

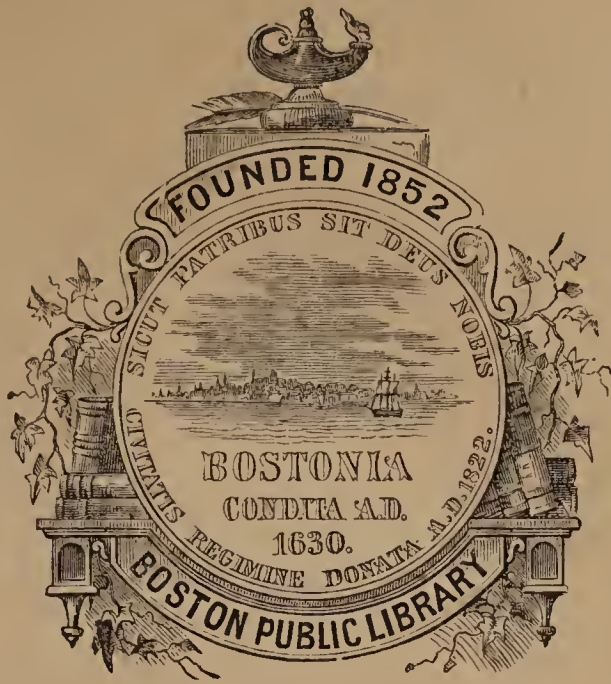
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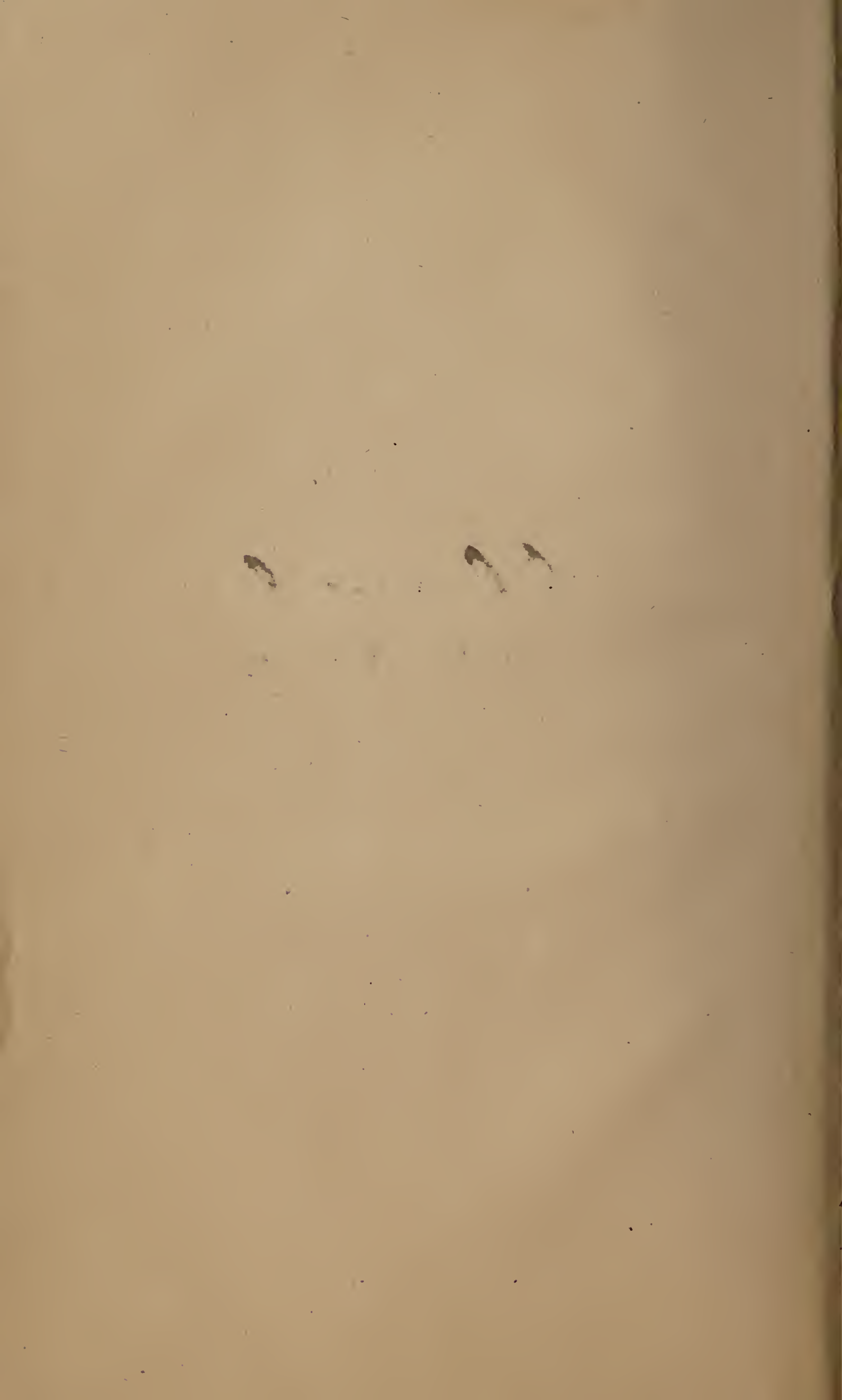


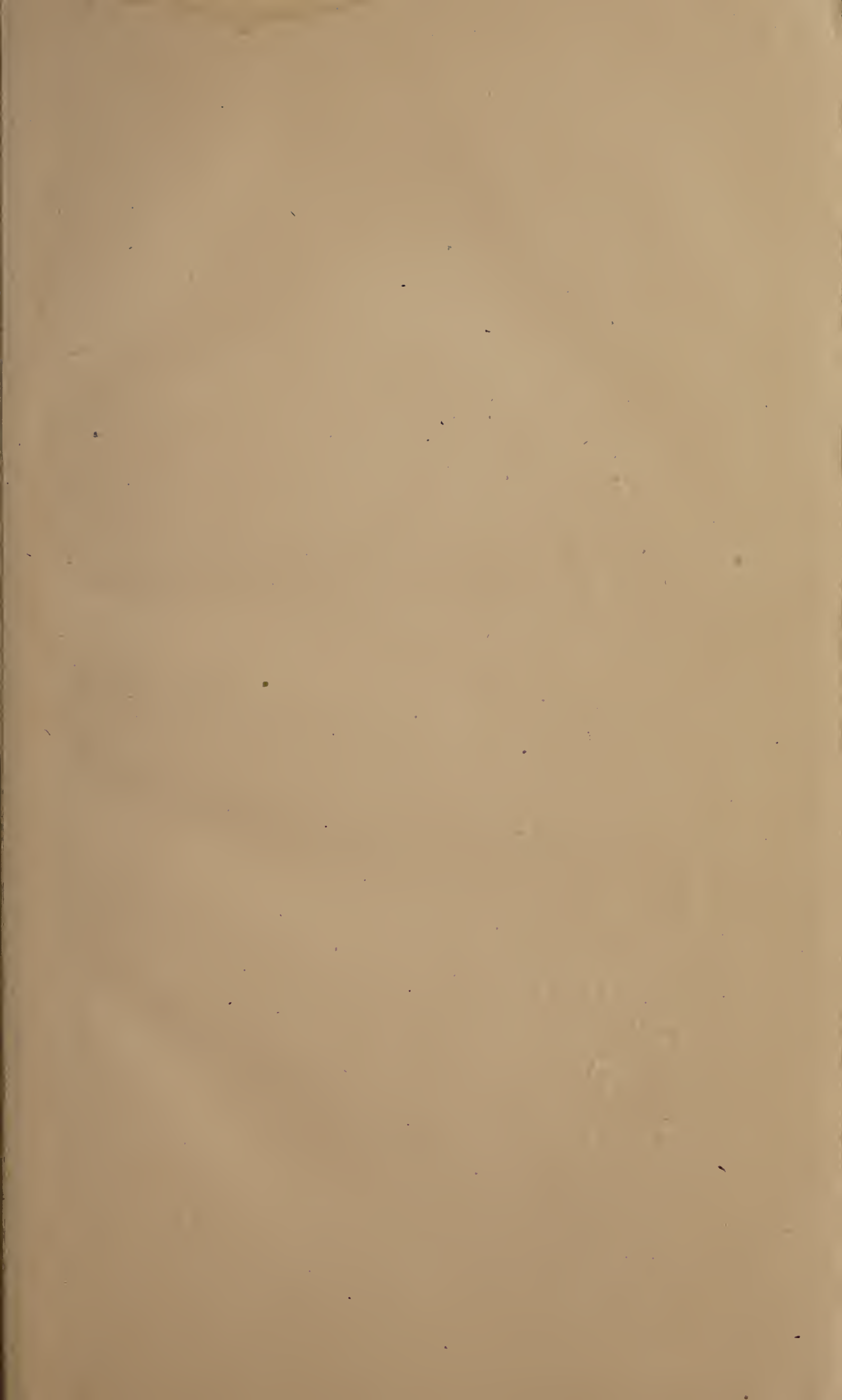
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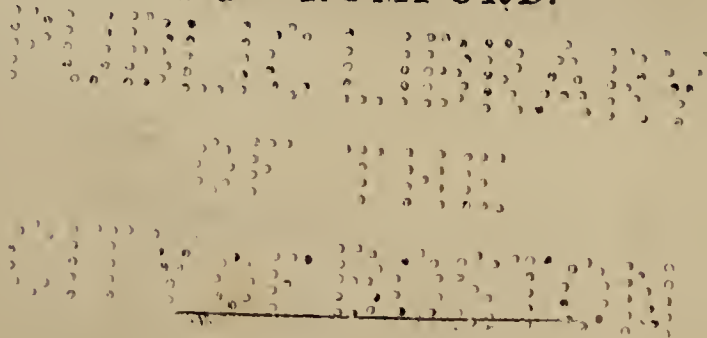
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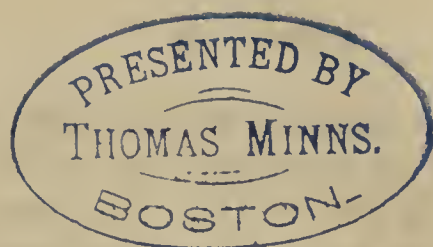
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AUGUST, 1824.

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PREFACE.

IN the all important concerns of education, the prevailing scheme of study, both here and in Europe, appears to involve a species and a degree of inconsistency wholly unaccountable.

During the 16th and 17th centuries, while Grecian philosophy was in vogue, the reign of error was indeed, beyond measure, more extensive ; but it was more consistent—Principle and practice went together—The dogmas of Aristotle passing then for the first principles of science, the empire of authority was universal ; and mental subjugation, as it was unfelt, was unsuspected. The attention then paid to ancient language, as the natural avenue to ancient wisdom, was but a part of the general delusion and harmonized with it. In the system as a whole, however erroneous, there was a congruity and a fitness well calculated both to dazzle and deceive ; and it did deceive for many a generation. But what is the state of things in our day ?—Ancient philosophy is altogether exploded. In no one department of science, physical or metaphysical, political or moral, are the ancients looked up to as suitable guides. Their principles, it is true, were not invariably wrong, and their doctrines often were accidentally right ; but their general theories, on all subjects, have long been renounced by common consent, as being either visionary, or inadequate, or ill adapted to the state of the world as we now find it.

Nor is this any disparagement to those who were called to think and act at earlier periods. When the progress of knowledge is recorded, though but imperfectly, each generation begins its career with better helps—it takes its departure from a more advanced point—and as this process has been going on ever since the art of writing was first invented, more especially since the art of printing, the present race of men must possess by many degrees a larger fund of intelligence than their remote ancestors, though nowise superior perhaps by nature. To travel over the ground of ancient learning does really seem then like going over our alphabet at the age of manhood.

The most passionate admirer of antiquity cannot deny that in our day knowledge is incomparably more accurate, more extensive, and what is better still, of a more practical character. Starting as it does from observation and experiment instead of speculation and conjecture, it rests on a more substantial foundation—Hence men deceive themselves much less. What now passes for knowledge, is, in a far greater proportion than formerly, really such. Not that the world is free from doubt and hypothesis, for of these there is yet abundance and always will be. Nor are the minds of men exempt from delusion ; for though less frequent, it is in some cases quite as predominant. Of this, the actual state of education is at once the most striking example, and the most efficient cause. What greater infatuation can be imagined than that of retaining the languages as an indispensable branch of education, at a time when every thing they exclusively contain is admitted to have lost its value. Yet at this very day the dialects of Greece and Rome are taught with scarcely less enthusiasm than at the period when they were believed to be the only possible source of information. Classical partialities, for many years expelled our halls of science, still loiter in our schools. Homer and Virgil, Plato and Cicero are still the charm—still the precious rosary, by which every youthful aspirant is taught to count his lessons, and appreciate his mental stock. And worst of all, ancient Prosody, that farce of farces, still wins the prize. Now here, if I mistake not, is a force of delusion unmatched by any thing even of the 16th century—an incongruity which no past age could equal, and no future perhaps ever believe.

From a train of reflections similar to the foregoing, the author of the following pages was long ago persuaded that the dead languages were far from meriting, and far from compensating, the time, the attention, or the expence now bestowed on them. The arguments used in their behalf he was convinced must be fallacious. These impressions, so far from having abated by any thing he has since heard, or seen, or read, have gained new force in all respects.

With a view of bringing the matter into discussion, the greater portion of what is here contained was published last autumn under the form of Essays, in the *Boston Centinel* ; hoping by that means to draw from those, who seem governed by a contrary persuasion, a lucid, methodical and argumentative exposition of the subject as viewed on their side. But this expectation was not realized. A defence of the reign-

ing system was indeed commenced by two writers in two different papers, but soon abandoned ; though not without an eloquent appeal, on the part of one, to the official guardians of ancient learning, to take up its defence, and rescue it from so awkward a posture—yet nothing more has appeared.*

The object in now publishing the substance of those papers under a new form, with some additions, is to avail of a different path of circulation, and thus give the argument a greater chance of being fully refuted, if it merits such a fate ; or being more read and reflected upon, should it deserve a better.—One chance especially it may have in its present shape, which is that of being handled by our periodical writers ; and this perhaps would be as good a way as any of bringing the matter fairly into debate. The habits, talents, and turn of thought, among this class of writers, render them perfectly *au fait*, on such questions ; and if the case be manageable, they will not wait long for an invitation.

But however well, or however ill, the course of reasoning here pursued may pass the ordeal of public judgment, to apologize for inviting attention to this or any other topic of general interest, would be almost an insult to the spirit of the age. It is our good fortune to live in times, when nothing is held too sacred to be brought to the test of reason ; and truth may be followed in any direction, without stopping to inquire through whose fields it might lead us. If any one perceives, or thinks he perceives, either a latent defect or a pernicious tendency in prevailing habits, customs, or modes of thinking, he is at least justified, perhaps in some measure obligated, to state his argument, and submit the case to the decision of others. I am aware however that there are some prejudices too dear to be abandoned without a sigh ; and persons may be imagined so peculiarly situated that the stronger the argument, the less welcome the doctrine ; yet whoever might attempt to excite alarm at the consequences, would show by that very attempt that he lives at least half a century too late.

Education, considered in all its influences, is perhaps the most important subject, next to religion, that can occupy the human mind ; being in some sort the basis, the substratum of that whole mass of habits, feelings, and opinions, which go to constitute character, as well national as individual. And yet, it is made the subject of mature reflection with very few—though often a casual topic of conversation. It is but too

* The reader may see an extract from this appeal in the Appendix.

common a failing among parents, even intelligent parents, to distrust their own ability to judge of the proper objects of study, especially as regards the languages. Nine out of ten may perhaps be truly said to have no independent opinion of their own, deduced from data and reasonings of their own.—From this cause chiefly, aided however by others, the whole management of school affairs has long been in the hands of certain classes of men, respectable unquestionably, and well informed—but still, men whose partialities have in some measure become fixed by their own early studies, and by subsequent habits—a good portion of whom being also in office under the system, may well be content to keep things as they are.

With regard to the importance of the dead languages, faith has floated long enough on loose unscrutinized assumptions,—those therefore by whose patronage they are upheld may now very reasonably be called upon for a systematic justification of this sort of study, in the manner and extent now practised. If it can be defended, they will rejoice in any opportunity, however presented, for removing the doubts of others—doubts they may be assured much oftener concealed than expressed—At all events, the cause can never suffer for want of champions—there are pens enough in its service, and good will enough.

To me, however, the system appears wholly indefensible ; and I have little doubt of satisfying every attentive reader that at any rate the common grounds of defence will not avail. The chief embarrassment lies in the nature of the subject—wholly incapable of being disposed of briefly, yet too little attractive to sustain attention—at least without other graces than are at my command. But when it is considered what enormous sums of money, to say nothing of the much greater value of time, are constantly and often inconveniently lavished on Greek and Latin, it may be hoped that parents, if no others, will listen with some degree of patience to an attempt to prove (what is seriously believed the truth) that all this may be saved without any disadvantage to their children, nay, with a positive benefit to them.

The reader may be assured, if that will be any comfort to him, that a learned disquisition is not to be aimed at, and for a very good reason, as he may guess ; but so far is it from being needful, the subject is already not a little obscured by the mist of erudition. The *endeavour* will be to disperse the mist, and make the matter intelligible to plain unlettered common sense.

Classical men, it may be feared, will be disappointed in every way—no flowers of rhetoric—no sprigs of classical allusion—and not a single line in compliment to ancient learning—but as to novelty, they will find one kind of it abundant enough—opinions, reasonings and quotations will be of quite another complexion to what they are accustomed. It is not conceded however, that scholars are at all more likely to form a correct judgment on such topics, than any other intelligent men who may choose to investigate for themselves, and draw their own conclusions.—One of the best vouchers for correctness of opinion is freedom from all previous bias, in which respect other men have greatly the advantage—and if the reflecting portion of the community could once be prevailed upon to think really for themselves in these matters, I am inclined to believe that many academic notions, now current, would soon lose their effect.

Indeed, to take things even as we find them, the classical scheme may be said to rest quite as much on fashion as on any settled persuasion of its benefit.—“It is surprising (says Dr. Gilchrist in his book on Etymology) that so few have perceived how destructive to intellect the prevailing system of classical education is ; *or rather that so few have had courage to avow it.*” Now here is pointed out one of the principal causes that has operated to keep these studies in vogue. It is not so much the universality of belief in their efficacy, as the want of sufficient independence, on the part of those who doubt, to declare their real sentiments. It is very apparent that classical learning has long been on the decline in Europe, notwithstanding its far more intimate connexion, in numberless ways, with the government, the church, and in short the whole structure of society, than it has now, or ever has had, in this country. Here, there is certainly no decline ; but yet here, as well as there, a considerable portion of those who have gone through the regular course, think by no means highly of it, and this they often confess *under the rose*—the mischief is, they are deterred from a free expression of their thoughts, by the overwhelming influence of established institutions. It is gratifying to observe that in England at least, a more manly tone is of late becoming prevalent, of which the reader will find some specimens, well deserving his perusal, here printed in the appendix. They are taken from periodical works of some celebrity ; which being uniformly conducted by scholars of note, it is scholars themselves who speak in the pages referred to—and as the same remark will

apply to nine tenths of all the quotations I have thought proper to introduce in the course of the argument, it is perfectly fair, in short almost unavoidable, to consider all these, as far as they go, as so many *concessions made by an opponent*. Indeed, in any other light, few would have been admitted; for to appeal to authority in argumentative discussions is always a sort of *petitio principii*, or in common parlance, *begging the question*.

Before closing these prefatory remarks, already long enough, I beg leave to say a few words on the *manner* in which the inquiry is pursued, at this time and before—not however in a literary point of view, for I hold the art of writing, or in other words, the facings and trimmings of literary composition, at too cheap a rate to feel any solicitude on that score. But it has been hinted by more than one, whose opinion on the general subject accords sufficiently well with my own, that a sort of sneering air pervades the whole, at which offence may very likely be taken. As to this, the reader must bear in mind, in justice to the writer, that when *scholars* are spoken of, reference is made abstractly to their *scholarship*—for which having really no great respect, it would have been a breach of candour to counterfeit what I could not feel. Whether Dr. Watts be right in saying that “a mere scholar is but a contemptible sort of thing in the world” is perhaps doubtful, at least as to this country; but what we all know is, that for the *active purposes* of life, he is for the most part a very *helpless sort of thing*. Nevertheless when this species of learning is allied to valuable acquisitions of other kinds, as it often is; and especially when properly kept under, as it sometimes is; I may with perfect consistency, and actually *do* entertain a sincere regard for its possessor, though none for the object possessed. Classical learning, as I view it, adds nothing to the merit of any man; nor on the other hand can it subtract any thing. If those who make scholarship their hobby, feel hurt at any thing contained in these pages (which by the way is not very likely) no apology would answer any purpose; and as to the far larger portion, as I believe them to be, who wear their robe loosely, as a mere dress of fashion; their *real* sentiment, could we get at it, would differ from mine, there is reason to believe, much less than is generally supposed.

CLASSICAL LEARNING.

CHAPTER I.

Presumptions in favour of the dead languages considered—their alleged advantages stated.

THE advocates of classical learning often contend, and with apparent gravity, that its utility is no longer a debateable point—that such strong presumptions may be shown in its favour as ought to supersede all farther inquiry into its merits. It is presumable, say they, that a branch of instruction, which has continued for many centuries, and been so generally approved, must possess intrinsic value, and should therefore be entitled to a distinguished place in every system of liberal education. This to be sure is a handy way of proving a thing useful; but it will not bear examination. The inference they would draw, though plausible enough at first view, will, on a little reflection, be found to rest on a twofold assumption, which the experience of all ages might refute. It supposes that any species of knowledge, or course of tuition, that was found advantageous in early periods of the world, must necessarily be so in all subsequent periods; and it supposes likewise that whatever obtains general assent must have truth and value for its basis. But the slightest acquaintance with the history of human society, and human knowledge, might lead us to distrust either branch of the hypothesis. As regards the first, that what was useful in former times must be useful now, so far from being founded on proof, it is even devoid of probability. For it would seem much more likely, antecedent to all observation, that when important changes

have occurred in the condition of mankind, a corresponding change becomes expedient in matters of instruction. Not only may the value of different branches of knowledge have altered materially, but others before wholly unknown, yet of inestimable importance to the comforts and happiness of men, may have been brought into life ; which indeed is actually the case in our day. In a progressive age therefore the chance *always* is, that systems of long standing are *not* precisely such as the period requires ; and habit, in such an age, becomes a dead weight, which, if not cast off, must inevitably retard the progress. Education indeed, if wholly unfettered by prejudice, would naturally keep pace with the mutations incident to society, otherwise there could be nothing rational about it. And is it supposable that the industrious and enterprising men of our day, or even the professional and scientific, are best fitted for pursuing their several vocations by the school learning of antiquity—the learning of an age as unlike our own in character as it is remote in time ?

But the argument I now oppose is almost too frivolous to need an elaborate examination. Do those who hold such language mean to insist, that the practice of ages long passed by is alone competent authority for us ? If they do, then, instead of confining their patronage to the dead languages, they ought, if they would be consistent, to revive alchemy, astrology, necromancy, scholastic philosophy, and a thousand other fooleries and nonentities, which the common sense of mankind has long since exploded. This whole train of follies, one as much as another, have an equal right, under this argument, to protection and encouragement. Consequently, either the doctrine has no validity whatever, or each and every one of the impostures just mentioned should again take rank at our seats of learning—an alternative that may well be left with such reasoners to choose as they list.

With regard to the other notion, that a prevailing favourable opinion is adequate proof of intrinsic excellence ; I admit it to be *presumptive* proof, but nothing more—for most certainly neither sound philosophy, nor subsequent experience, has invariably justified public sentiment. Many are the sources of error, and many the causes that may combine to fasten it upon the world.—The influence of education and of habit, the proneness to imitation, the veneration for antiquity, and innumerable others, separately or collectively, may operate to this end. Hence it is, that in topics of this nature, moralists as well as metaphysicians have ever found inexhaustible

themes both for speculation and admonition. Nor could any thing better deserve their most serious meditation ; for here lie the germs of numberless prejudices. When causes like these, having a deep foundation in human nature, have co-operated to perpetuate either a speculative doctrine or a practical line of conduct, their combined efficacy has been truly surprising. What monstrous errors, both of theory and practice, have, in different periods of the world, controlled the minds and guided the actions of men, not only for years, but even centuries in succession—errors so pernicious in their tendency, and, once dispelled, so manifest too, as to create astonishment they should ever have prevailed. Whoever has turned over the page of history will find many examples of this nature press on his recollection.

We need not remount, in search of apt illustrations, to those periods, which by force of custom we call the brilliant eras of Greece and Rome ; but during which, in truth, the whole body of philosophy and the whole course of practice were little else than error and superstition ;—nor shall I advert to the evanescent subtleties of monkish metaphysics, which the schoolmen of the 12th and 13th centuries imposed on the world as real knowledge. It is directly to our purpose, however, to call to mind another delusion, immediately relating to education, which took its rise or rather was revived about the same period, and unhappily maintained its ascendancy through many ages, quite down to our own times ; I mean *Syllogistic Logic*. The intricate web of sophistry, to which the method of syllogism owed its origin, was so ingeniously wrought by Aristotle, that soon after the revival of his philosophy, the method was adopted in all the Schools, Colleges, and other literary institutions, as the grand, or rather the only efficient instrument for eliciting truth or detecting error in every department of knowledge. Yet modern reasoners have proved to demonstration (particularly Locke, Reid, and Stewart,) that this system of logic, with all its “wild meanders of mood and figure,” can furnish no clue whatever to those intermediate ideas, which, in every argumentative process, constitute the proof. In short, as a mode of investigation, it is manifestly useless, and has been so considered by every writer of the last half century, with the single exception, as far as I know, of the author of two volumes on Rhetoric and Oratory. He indeed seems strangely fascinated with this splendid bubble of the Stagyrte ; which, as Lord Kames well observes, is “beautiful in form and colours, but empty within.” Such as the

scheme was, however, with all its absurdity and all its formal pedantry, the world regarded it for ages, under sanction of the schools, as the only path to knowledge. Here then was a branch of instruction, of so imposing an aspect, as to take precedence of all others in academic institutions, for several generations after its futility had been completely exposed. *Is it possible to have a case more in point ?**

Nor have such mistakes by any means been confined to subjects purely speculative. The records of physical science, of astronomy, chemistry, geography, agriculture, mechanics, and in short every branch, furnish not less numerous nor less striking memorials of human fallibility—Nay, in matters still more practical, in commerce, where men profess to be guided exclusively by observation and experiment, as their polar stars, hypothesis has often triumphed in despite even of common sense. For a long course of years, as we all know, the only criterion of advantageous commerce was thought to consist in the *balance of trade* ; and it is quite within our own times, that this mistaken theory has been exploded. So likewise on notions equally delusive, was founded the selfish system of exclusion and restriction which for ages past has most injuriously abridged the mercantile intercourse of nations ; and here too, as far at least as Europe is concerned, we perceive at last the force of error rapidly giving way under a more liberal and much wiser policy. In matters of this kind, where some of us, perhaps, feel more at home, we can better realize the progress of knowledge—we can almost discern the precise manner, in which, sooner or later, the light of reason chases away the fog of prejudice.

* It may reasonably create astonishment with all who are not aware to what lengths classic faith will sometimes push on its devotees, to find this relic of vain philosophy still the object of adoration. The opinion of the author above alluded to is not more singular, however, than the manner in which it is conveyed. Speaking of syllogism, he says, "It is enough for me to believe it the most compendious and most irresistible process of reason that the human mind has ever discovered ; and having the express authority of Aristotle for excluding it from the ways and means of oratory, I need not enter into the scrutiny how far it may be useful elsewhere."—What ! Aristotle exclude from oratory "the most irresistible process of reason ?" a process too of his own invention ?—The ancient sage must really have been a very droll fellow ; and his disciple also a little bit of a wag. Seriously however, if oratory be addressed to our rational faculties, why interdict the best mode of reasoning ? If it be not so addressed, why write two volumes to set forth its excellence ? (see vol. 2. page 37.) I am happy to see that Professor Hedge, in his unpretending, yet very judicious little book, estimates the thing differently and much more philosophically.

Of all infatuations, however, none are more astonishing than the absurd and revolting superstitions, which have marked the course of man in his religious rites and tenets—degrading often the human character to the brute, the divine to the human.

The sort of opinions and practices to which we have just adverted, it may be remarked, were *always errors*, at whatever period they may have been in vogue. There never was a time when any of them were true, just or expedient. Besides these, however, there have no doubt been doctrines, customs, and habits of other kinds, which at certain epochs were well adapted to existing circumstances, and for a while therefore were just or proper—yet, owing to some change in the ever-varying state of human society, became at length prejudicial—and it is a common observation, that, from the very nature of habit, such things will often continue long after their justifying causes or motives have ceased. “Men retain the errors of their infancy, their country and the age in which they live, (says a French writer) long after the truths necessary to the removal of those errors are acknowledged.” Whether classical studies belong to the former or the latter description of customs, it is not needful to determine. It may be they really *were* useful in the early periods of modern Europe; though even this, to my mind, is not very apparent.—Whether so or not, no man, it is presumed, will go so far as to maintain that the time can *never* arrive when they may be spared—but if such a period be possible, it *may now be present*; and what proof have we that it is not? At any rate, the slightest glance at the history of mankind is enough to convince us that implicit confidence should never be reposed in the truth of any theory, or the propriety of any custom merely because it has reigned long and obtained general assent. Even in the present age we have no right to think ourselves infallible; for with all the light that advanced knowledge and improved science diffuse around, what can insure us against error, should education, custom, and the spirit of imitation conspire to impose it.

While therefore we are bound to regard with suitable respect whatever is ancient and of long standing, it no less behoves us on the other hand to be watchful against any undue bias from this source. A reverence for antiquity is indeed so natural and so common, giving rise at the same time to prejudices so numerous, that the learned and candid Dr. Watts, in his book on Logic, has not only classed it among the springs

of false judgment, but dwells on it with peculiar emphasis and repeated cautions. The following quotations* have a direct application to our subject :—“ It is custom (says he) and not reason that sends every boy to school to learn the Roman Poets, and begin a little acquaintance with Greek before he is bound out an apprentice.” Again he says, “ This business of fashion has a most powerful influence on our judgment ; for it employs the two strong engines, fear and shame, to operate on our understandings with unhappy success. We are ashamed to believe or profess any unfashionable opinion in philosophy.” “ We pay deference to the opinions of others merely because they lived two thousand years before us ; and even the trifles and impertinences that have the mark of antiquity upon them, are revered for this reason, because they came from the ancients.” He further remarks, “ to believe in all things as our predecessors did is the ready way to keep mankind in an everlasting state of infancy.” Finally, he says in another book,† “ If we would find out the truth, we must in many cases dare to deviate from the long beaten track, and venture to think with a free and unbiased liberty.” With similar independence of sentiment, that great detector of ancient sophistry, Locke, observes “ some will not admit an opinion not authorized by men of old who were then all giants in knowledge. Nothing is to be put into the scale of truth which has not the stamp of Greece or Rome upon it ; and it is scarcely allowed that since those days men have been able to see, think or write.”‡ So too my Lord Chesterfield, who surely cannot be accused of classical antipathies : “ We are really so prejudiced by our education, that as the ancients deified their heroes, so we deify their madmen, of which, with all due regard to antiquity, I take Leonidas and Curtius to be two distinguished ones.”|| The class of prejudices of which we are now speaking is also finely satirized by Pope,

“ Authors, like coins, grow dear as they grow old ;
But 'tis the rust we value, not the gold.”

Such then are the sentiments of men who knew how to ap-

* Watts's Logic, part 2. chap. 3. sec. 4.

† Watts on the Mind, part 2. chap. 4.

‡ Locke on the Understanding, sec. 24.

|| Chesterfield's Selected Letters, page 97.

preciate the potent influence of fashion, education and authority, in matters of opinion.

It would no doubt be always an instructive, and sometimes an amusing exercise, to investigate the causes that have originated, or given permanence to any prevailing custom ; but as this can never be considered an indispensable preliminary to a discussion of its real merits, we may well avoid on the present occasion so extensive a field of research. This remark naturally points our attention more directly to the subject proposed for consideration.

That Latin and Greek are eminently useful, in some way or other, is a belief taken up so early in life, that no man is able to say how or when he came by it. The notion is imbibed almost in infancy ; and ever after, in school, in college, in society at large, its echo meets our ear ; and thus it passes as a self-evident axiom requiring neither proof nor authority. All seem to partake the impression, though few ever think of assigning to themselves any reason at all, and none I believe could assign a good one.

So numerous indeed are the pleasing associations by which these studies are surrounded, and so extensive the influence of literary institutions in which they are pursued, that one may be thought almost to commit a sacrilege in doubting their utility. Yet could we regard them, divested of all imaginary charms and excellences ; they might appear perhaps quite unworthy the homage they have received. In short, the importance attached to them might exhibit possibly another instance of those wide-spread and lasting delusions, that have so often reigned unsuspected, and for this very reason unexamined. In this light, as I believe, the matter will sooner or later appear to all.

Numberless are the encomiums, incidental and special, which the studies here objected to have received from the pens of the learned ; while in the transient conversations of social life, they gather a daily tribute of praise and admiration. But commendation of the latter kind being more frequently the offspring of fashion, than reflection, and seldom supported by any show of reasoning, to the former we must refer, if we would wish to know the kind or degree of utility ascribed to such studies. Unfortunately, however, their eulogists among writers have been almost as vague as among talkers. The most definite of any perhaps are, Dr. Beattie in his essay on classical learning, Dr. Gregory in an essay on the same subject, and those celebrated teachers Drs. Barrow and Knox in

their ample volumes on education—all learned men, though each of them abounding, as we shall see, in occasional confessions quite at variance with their theories. The substance of all the arguments advanced by these writers, or as far as I know, by others, may be embraced in the following propositions :—

1st. That the true signification of numerous English words can be learnt only by appealing to Latin.

2d. That an acquaintance with the structure of the dead languages leads to a more accurate grammatical knowledge of our own.

3d. That a familiarity with the ancient classics imparts an elegance and gives a polish to English composition, unattainable by other means.

4th. That ancient writings contain a fund of valuable knowledge, to which the mere English reader has no access.

5th. That they open an inexhaustible source of rational and elegant amusement for leisure hours, and thus wean us from recreations less innocent, or less praiseworthy.

6th. That these studies afford a salutary exercise of the mental faculties, induce habits of application, and occupy a period of youth which could not otherwise be advantageously employed.

Such are the recommendations most frequently urged in behalf of classical studies ; and if the reader will reflect upon it, he will find that all he has ever heard said on that side, or at least all that has had any weight in his mind, will fall under one or the other of these heads. Not that they embrace all, strictly speaking ; for so boundless is modern gratitude that scarcely any excellence, real or imaginary, but has been accounted for in that way. Mr. Knox, indeed, seems to think that every thing desirable will follow in the train ; and that taste, religion, virtue, and even the liberties of mankind are intimately connected with the support of ancient learning. The last North American Review also contains something of this stamp. In an article on classical learning we find all the old grounds neglected ; and the writer flutters away over fields entirely new, and so nimbly as rarely to be got sight of. If a reader can catch him anywhere, it must be at one of these points—that *some* foreign literature is indispensable, and any but the classics would endanger our literary independence—that they are faithful assistants of creative genius, (though by the way Knox admits their *barrenness of invention*)—that as we have no ancient monuments in this country, no ruins, no

specimens of art, no Roman jurisprudence, we must fain take their language or nothing—which as any one may perceive is begging the question all the way through. But such extravagance is the legitimate object of ridicule, not of argument. The preceding six propositions (or arguments if you please to call them) it is intended to treat successively, and as far as possible specifically. And in doing this I expect to satisfy the reader, that if classical learning is destined still to triumph (in reason I mean) the victory must be won under new banners.

It would be nowise difficult to show at the outset, that my sentiments on this subject, though counter to the main stream of opinion, are far from being entirely new—that in many respects they have found advocates among such men as Bacon, Locke, Kames, Priestley, Sheridan and many others of high standing in literature and science. Volumes might be filled with quotations of this tendency. I shall here offer but two, and those from writers yet more recent, and whose sentiments are yet more distinctly expressed. Mr. Heron, whose classical attainments no one can doubt, expresses himself, in his "Letters on Literature" as follows—"One of the most glaring defects in the present state of pedantic science (by which he means the science of education) is the great time wasted in acquiring the dead languages, which in nine cases out of ten are of no use to the child, but in fact are quite neglected and forgotten by him in a few months after he leaves the school. Perfection of folly, to waste the precious years of human life in learning useless languages."* Again, speaking of such a student, he says, "his being a man all his life is of no consequence, provided he is a scholar for a few years—prejudice, prejudice! when will the happy period arrive that human kind will break thy detestable shackles, only strong from the weakness of the wearer." My next citation is from a spirited essay against the prevailing system, written by the late celebrated Dr. Rush of Philadelphia, about forty years since—"The expulsion of Latin and Greek from our schools would produce a revolution in science and in human affairs—That nation which shall first shake off the fetters of those ancient languages, will advance further in knowledge and in happiness, in twenty years, than any nation in Europe has done in a hundred."† This anticipation of the Doctor's appears to me to

* Heron's Letters, page 34S.

† Rush's Essay.

be a conclusion of sound philosophy ; resulting from a comprehensive view of things, and from a just comparison of the sort of knowledge required by the existing circumstances of the world, contrasted with the deficiency as well as the defects of the reigning system—a system, to the whole of which might very properly be applied the reflections of a learned Professor on certain parts of it—“ we call to mind (says he) that this weighty chain of prescription was forged in other times and under other circumstances ; why then should we hesitate in refusing to drag it after us any longer, now that a change has taken place ?”^{*} It must be confessed, however, that the efficacy of all past attempts to stem the torrent of prejudice has been small ; and although in the present instance it may be still less, there is yet some consolation in the belief, grounded on various indications, that the lapse of another half century will witness a radical change of public sentiment in this respect.

If it be wondered, that such a prediction should be hazarded at a moment when all our classical seminaries are gradually expanding under the bright sunshine of public patronage, and private munificence ; let it be remembered, it was at the very acme of papal supremacy that Luther and his coadjutors arose, and by a bold appeal to men’s reason, rent asunder the fetters of mental bondage, and laid prostrate the Romish tiara. It is indeed when error is most triumphant that it is most felt, and then is precisely the time to expect its overthrow. The moon can be eclipsed only at her full. It must not be imagined, however, that the author of these remarks so wofully mistakes his own powers as to fancy that he is to be the instrument of a similar revolution in matters of education. He is under no such illusion—yet there is a chance of awakening attention, and thus stimulating others who are equal to the task ; and of such he believes there are not a few. No doubt the prepossessions by which the existing system is sustained are as tenacious as they are numerous, and run through every vein of society ; yet to overcome them would require by no means the genius, nor the learning, though perhaps it might all the perseverance, that fell to the lot of the illustrious reformer in religion. The consequences of such a change would, in my opinion, be no less beneficial to the best interests of society.

* North American Review, vol. 11th. page 211.

CHAPTER II.

The dead languages, no guide to the signification of English words.

HAVING offered such preliminary remarks as seemed appropriate, we now come into closer contact with the specific arguments usually advanced on the side of classical studies. Of those arguments none perhaps is so uniformly insisted upon as this—that great aid may thence be obtained for determining the true import of English words—yet nothing, I venture to say, can be more fallacious. That a doctrine so industriously promulgated should have made its way into the minds even of well informed people, is not indeed to be wondered at ; but we may well be surprised to find it sanctioned by scholars, whose acquaintance with classic tongues should have taught them better. This sanction is the more extraordinary, and indeed quite unaccountable, since it is well known that the higher grade of philological writers—men in whom were united the attainments of the linguist, metaphysician, and logician—all admit that no foreign language whatever can be of any avail in this respect. The authorities that might be appealed to on this head would be conclusive ; not however by the mere influence of names, for that should weigh little ; but by the cogency of their reasonings. Indeed every man, who has maturely considered the nature and use of words as conventional signs of ideas, would concede the point at once ; for signs, to be conventional, must receive their signification from common consent. But as many persons, possibly the majority, have never turned their thoughts this way, the subject must be gone into at some length, and viewed in various lights, in order to convince such persons that foreign tongues can have no agency in the case.

But in the first place I would call the reader's attention to the manner in which the claims of scholarship are usually set forth. Often it consists of nothing more than some general assertion, that such or such good effects is produced. But the more usual way perhaps is to adopt a phraseology wholly indeterminate, which, though *implying* much, may easily find

in its own vagueness a safeguard against any decisive refutation. Sometimes however the thing is managed in another way—a proposition is laid down in terms sufficiently distinct, and is argued upon ; but afterwards certain exceptions, qualifications, and explanations are admitted, of such a nature as to destroy its whole force. To illustrate, we may take what Dr. Gregory says on the very topic now in hand—In his essay before referred to, he relies on bare assertion, as follows, “It is impossible (says he) to know the full force, the correct application of words, without in some degree, being acquainted with their source.” But in his Letters, where the topic is more enlarged upon, he proceeds after the manner last described. He begins at page 40 in this way, “one of the principal advantages of the dead languages is, that it acquaints us with the etymology of the many words derived from them, and this is *often* the most certain guide to their correct application.” We see here, that the Dr. is a little cautious at the very beginning—but observe how the proposition is frittered away afterwards—“Etymology (he says on the same page) will only lead us to the *literal* sense,” which sense, by the way, every reader knows, is only one out of many. On the next page he adds, “The true command of language is at last only to be gained by a diligent perusal of the best authors,” meaning, evidently from the context, *English* authors. Finally he tells us, three pages farther on, with regard to the choice of words, “Consult (says he) the best authors, and observe their different applications. The original sense is *not always a certain guide* in the use of common words, though, if nicely attended to, it will *sometimes* help us to the *reasons of their application*.” Now the reader will clearly perceive, that if due allowance be made for these explanations, the original proposition has entirely vanished ; and etymology, on summing up the account, is not worth a straw—But I proceed to argument.

That the dead languages can be of no avail, may be made apparent in various ways :—In the first place it is evident, with regard to a great number of words, that, as their origin is unknown, a resort to the parent tongue would be impossible. With regard to all others it would be deceptive, because not a term we use bears precisely the same signification with us, as in the language whence it was taken. Scarcely a word could be named, of Latin derivation, which has not gained some new meaning (in general many) unknown to the Romans ; and conversely, not one perhaps but has lost some of its an-

cient acceptations. In fact by far the larger portion of such words, having come to us not directly but mediately through the French, experienced no inconsiderable change of meaning on their passage. So that the French use much more nearly coincides with ours than the Latin does—yet who ever advised studying French for this purpose?

Another thing to be considered is (which those who insist on sending us back to Latin seem wholly to overlook) that in Latin, as in all other languages, words are used in *various* senses; and how are we to choose?

Again, if the import of terms in the parent tongue be the proper standard for us, why are we referred to *English* Dictionaries? Why not to Latin, French, Anglo-Saxon, or German? Or why does JOHNSON illustrate his definitions by quotations from English authors and not from Latin? Surely if etymology be the true guide, that great lexicographer was capitally mistaken in the whole scheme of his work—we ought indeed to set him down as a lunatic, and consign his book to future generations, under the persuasion that about five centuries hence, according to this theory, it will be nearly old enough to be serviceable.

But the futility of this etymological doctrine will appear more glaring, by considering the ultimate principle on which it rests, and whither it would lead us. This principle is, that the first use of a word, whencesoever it sprang, must regulate all its subsequent applications—consequently we must mount up to the *original source*, if we would ascertain the true import. That we can stop no where short of this, when once we leave our own boundaries, will be evident from the following reflection:—that the word whose meaning we seek may possibly not be original in the language whence we have taken it, and may, for all we know, be as doubtfully applied there as in our own. If therefore any such term can be traced to the Latin, we must next inquire how it came there; and this probably would refer us to the Greek. But there the case may be the same and we should be sent to some more eastern dialect, and so on—for as the Greeks were indebted to eastern nations for most of their knowledge and science, so were they also in a good measure for their language, even to their very alphabet. But suppose, if you please, that in ascending this stream of pedigree, we reach its source, and thus ascertain in what tongue a word took its rise; the next step is to seek for the original signification in which it was used (for the plain reason that all others may be wrong) and this most certainly could never be

found. Consequently we should be no nearer the object of pursuit at the end than at the beginning of our labours; and should return from the chase of this *ignis fatuus*, bewildered and deceived. Such then being the probable and even necessary result of etymological researches, how unphilosophical, how utterly futile must be the doctrine we now oppose. Let us make however one supposition more—let us suppose a man so miraculously gifted as to be able to discover the original sense, strictly speaking, of a few words; and that he were to construct a sentence with reference to that sense; what would be the effect? why simply this, that no other mortal living could guess its meaning.

Lest this course of reasoning, however, should not be equally convincing to all, I beg leave to place the subject in yet another light. It will be readily allowed that not more than one in ten among us knows any thing of the dead languages, nor one in a hundred is familiar with them. In such a state of things it follows *unavoidably* either that ninety-nine out of the hundred talk and write habitually without understanding each other at all—that is to say we “gabble like things most brutish;” or else we have some criterion in regard to signification independent of Latin or Greek. But we find by daily experience that we *do* understand each other—those who are not scholars just as well as those who are—consequently the standard of meaning must exist in our own language and nowhere else. This standard is *custom* or good usage, as exemplified in approved English authors; and it has been so recognized by all writers on grammar and criticism for many years past. That such is and must be the *only* standard is ably set forth in Dr. CAMPBELL’S “*Philosophy of Rhetoric*,”* and in various other established works.

The diversified significations thus assigned by usage, have, with infinite labour, been sought out by lexicographers, and methodically compiled in the form of dictionaries—where lies our first resort. If in any case we are not satisfied with their decisions we may ultimately appeal to authors of repute in our own language; but in no case whatever to Latin or any foreign tongue. There might be thought perhaps at first view, to be exceptions to this rule, in words recently introduced; since fashion, it would seem, is never tired of borrowing from the French, and pedantry seldom satisfied without something

* Campbell’s *Philosophy of Rhetoric*. B. 2. chap. 1.

new from the Latin. But in truth, even in these cases we could never feel sure of getting at the sense intended, by resorting to other tongues ; for any man, who would be pedant enough to use words entirely new without at the same time defining their sense in plain English, we may rely upon it, would be fool enough to use them improperly.

If I thought it probable the foregoing reasonings would yet leave many readers unsatisfied, the subject might be elucidated in divers other ways, especially by showing how common a thing it is for a derivative word to differ materially in sense from its radical, even when this radical is of native origin. Besides, have not most of our words many and distinct significations, some even forty or fifty ? Is not their origin in numberless cases disputed ? Is not a large portion, perhaps the greater portion of them, used metaphorically ? Are they not, both in force and import, singularly modified by the context ? But the arguments against this whimsical doctrine are so numerous and so various it would be almost an endless, and I imagine quite a superfluous task to pursue them any farther. The truth is, however admirable a contrivance language may seem to be, in the eye of philosophy—as a means of expressing the subtle operations of mind—it is really a much less perfect thing than is commonly supposed. The principal index to signification, and the principal source of all variety, is *connexion*. A word separately taken, since it may be the sign of several, indeed many, different ideas, could seldom or never suggest any thing definite ; but place it in a sentence, and the context will enable us with little or no hesitation to attach the idea intended. Hence words, by themselves, can hardly be said to be pictures of thought, though in combination they certainly are so to a sufficient degree of precision for all ordinary purposes. We talk (says Stewart) of the *mechanism of speech*, but are apt to forget the far more wonderful mechanism which it puts into action behind the scene. Whoever may wish to see this curious branch of the subject illustrated in a manner equally beautiful and philosophical will find it in Dugald Stewart's 5th Essay.

Finally, to have a more distinct conception, both of the folly and the *danger* of seeking beyond the customary use of language for the meaning of words, let one but consider a moment what would be the effect of interpreting our *laws* on that principle. It would require no gift of prophecy to foresee that in less than one year after such a system began to operate, the whole structure of society would be completely

unhinged, and men would revert to a state of nature—a result as certain as that people *could not* live under laws, the meaning of which they were wholly unable to comprehend.

The views here presented of the topic in debate seem so rational, and at the same time so conclusive, that nothing more perhaps need be said. Yet as some persons are hardly willing to take the trouble of thinking for themselves on any subject; and as many others are rather too prone to distrust their own judgment, under the impression that none but scholars can decide on these matters, I beg leave to lay before the reader the opinions of men who have investigated the case profoundly—men too, who were not merely scholars, but something far superior.

The first whose opinion I shall cite against appealing to foreign tongues is the celebrated Dr. Campbell, whose acute and comprehensive intellect was devoted almost exclusively to subjects of this nature.

“With regard to etymology, (says he) about which grammarians make such a useless bustle, if every one has the privilege of altering words according to his own opinion of their origin, the opinions of the learned on this subject being so various, nothing but a general chaos can ensue.” And again, “It is never from an attention to etymology, which would frequently mislead us, but from *custom*, the only infallible guide in this matter, that the meaning of words in present use must be learnt. Besides, in no case can the line of derivation be traced back to infinity—we must always terminate in some word of whose genealogy no account can be given.”*

The next authority that happens to fall in our way is that very close thinker Dr. Watts, who expresses himself as follows:—

“But this tracing of a word to its original is sometimes a very precarious and uncertain thing. Many of our words which are applied to moral and intellectual ideas, when traced up to their original in the learned languages will be found to signify sensible and corporeal things.” He remarks in another place and very truly, “Time and custom alter the meaning of words—*knave* heretofore meant a diligent servant, and *villain* an under-tenant; but now both these words carry with them an idea of wickedness and reproach.” Or should we follow Tooke’s derivation (for derivations in numberless cases are

* Campbell’s Philosophy of Rhetoric. B. 2. chap. 1 sec. 3. and chap. 2 sec. 2.

doubtful) and refer the word *knave* to the Anglo-Saxon *Nafath* (*one who has nothing*) it would be equally remote from its present acceptation. We may take again as another instance of entire change of meaning, the word *imp*, which, as Johnson tells us, was formerly a term of dignity; and Shakspeare writes *dear imp*, *royal imp*; but now it is used, as we all know, in a sense not merely different, but directly opposite.*

Indeed words of this description are exceedingly numerous; and thus we see that even our own authors of two centuries back are no very safe guides for us. How then can we trust to Latin authors of twenty centuries? The truth is, mutability is a characteristic of language as regards meaning, no less than as regards spelling; and we might just as well insist on ancient orthography, as ancient signification.

But however striking the change of import, words often undergo after becoming component parts of a language, it is in general far less than what occurs when passing from one tongue to another. We have already remarked that every English word of Latin parentage (and the same may be said of Greek) has departed more or less from its ancient signification; and were this the proper place, a long catalogue might be given, whose derivation would indicate changes of a very curious, and often very ludicrous nature. We have an instance of this in the word *discourse*, which, traced to its Latin origin, means to *run about*. But most certainly such is not its meaning now, whatever some may think. Another example presents itself in the word *sycophant*, which Hume says (whether right or not I leave to those who can find amusement in such trifles,) is taken from two Greek words, signifying *a discoverer of figs*. Will any one pretend that this is what we mean now when we call a man a sycophant? It is not irrelevant, to remark, that the metamorphose of words in point of form too, is sometimes equally singular. Who would suppose that our word *stranger* could ever come from the Latin preposition *ex*?—yet few derivations it is said are better made out.

To return again to authorities, we shall next refer to Mr. Dugald Stewart, who in criticising some of *Tooke's* speculations, states his opinion as follows:—"To me on the contrary it appears that to appeal to etymology in a philosophical argument (excepting perhaps in those cases where the word itself is of philosophical origin) is altogether nugatory; and

* Watts's Logic, Part 1. Chap. 4.

can serve at best to throw an amusing light on the laws which regulate the operation of human fancy." To which he adds, "Etymology, if systematically adopted as a test of propriety, would lead to the rejection of all our ordinary modes of speaking."

Stewart indeed goes the length of affirming that such researches are positively injurious. "I have hardly met (says he) with a single individual habitually addicted to them, who wrote his own language with ease and elegance." Some may say perhaps that this is going too far; but certainly that profound metaphysician is not in the habit of thinking superficially or writing carelessly on any subject. In support of the idea that etymology is worse than useless, he quotes the sentiments of a French author, which are still more emphatically expressed, and which in substance are as follow:—"It is so rare that the etymology of a word coincides with its true acceptation, that this sort of research cannot be justified by the pretext that the sense may thereby be made more certain. Those writers who are acquainted with the greatest number of tongues are the very ones that make the most mistakes. Too attentive to ancient signification, they forget the actual import, and disregard those shades of meaning which give grace and energy to composition."*

In my judgment the French critic has described the effect of such studies most happily. Nothing I believe is more common among those who ponder much on Greek and Latin, than to overlook those "shades of meaning" here spoken of. To mention but one or two out of numberless cases. How else could a learned Professor cast a most unmerited stigma on God's chosen servant David, by calling him a "*notorious* personage," intending only that he was a *noted* one? How else could that pink of scholars, the author of *Hermes*, by a mistake of the same nature but reverse effect, convey a praise when he meant a reproach, by designating the Goths (I think it was) "*illustrious* barbarians?" To the same cause too should be ascribed the phraseology, as it formerly stood, of the English liturgy, "*Prevent* us, O Lord in all our doings, &c." Now in these, and a thousand similar instances, if Latin be the standard, scholars are certainly right; but if good usage or common acceptation is to direct us, (I submit to the reader's judgment,) it is equally certain they are wrong. Of all

* Stewart's 5th Essay.

books extant none is better fitted for teaching a nice discrimination in the use of words than "Crabbe's Synonymes," the whole of which from beginning to end is one continued illustration of the maxim that custom, not derivation, is the only safe guide. Crabbe, it is true, after stating the origin of a word, often gives a definition resulting from that origin; as may be seen by the word *desert* on his very first page. But it is easy to perceive in this as in most other cases, that not one of his various *applications* is conformable to the definition. In fact he never intends by those derivations to influence present use. He knows indeed much better; and in his book on education has explicitly stated a contrary opinion. "The present existing signification of words (says he) can be derived from no source so well as the most general acceptance they may be found to have received among men at present. Remote etymology is therefore of very little use except to show us the mechanism and origin of language." Thus then we have not only the express declaration of this indefatigable philologist, but also his entire book of more than a thousand pages, altogether in our favour.

To the foregoing authorities may be added one other, nearer home, whose opinion evidently does not differ—I mean Mr. John Pickering. From the whole tenor of the Essay, prefixed to his Vocabulary, especially from what is said at the 11th page, it is plain he considers *present use* as the only proper standard in the application of words. Accordingly, in examining some two or three hundred words in relation to meaning, he brings them to the test of dictionaries and established writers, without reference in a single instance, as far as I perceive, to any exotic standard.

It would be easy to cite many others on the same side; but it seems unnecessary. I desire the reader only to bear in mind that I have here quoted nothing casual, incidental, or obscure; but the deliberate sentiments of philosophic writers—of writers unsurpassed by any in the whole compass of English literature.

What then shall we say to Dr. Knox, who persists in affirming that "mere English scholars incur great danger of misapplying words derived from Greek and Latin?"—What shall we say to a learned Professor, who tells us that some words cannot be used in a *peculiarly correct* sense without understanding Greek?—Or what shall we say to hundreds of others, who

* North Am. Rev. vol. 2. new series, p. 210.

do their best to propagate the same scholastic doctrine?— Shall we suppose them ignorant of the true standard of meaning?— Shall we believe that in their own practice they throw aside their Johnson and their Walker, and appeal to Ainsworth and Schrevelius?— Or shall we suppose that they have a *system* to uphold, which requires that the importance of Greek and Latin should be maintained?

One might be led to think from the general tenor of Stewart's strictures on the ingenious and amusing work of *Tooke*, that he considered one of that author's objects to be to establish etymology as the proper means, and ancient use as the proper criterion for determining the actual meaning of words. There are, to be sure, many passages in that masterly disquisition, which might seem to justify the supposition; yet it is extremely difficult to believe either that Stewart really so construed it, or that such was *Tooke's* intention. If it was, his book becomes a greater curiosity still; for never did a writer so completely frustrate his own design. He exhibits to us in the clearest light, and by a multitude of examples, the precise manner in which a single *Anglo-Saxon* word, by successive changes of application and of orthography, has supplied to our present language a *variety* of terms differing most remarkably, both in form and import, from each other, as well as from their common original. *Tooke's* researches, therefore, furnish of themselves the most transcendent proof of the futility of etymology in this respect; and had it been certain the reader would have taken my advice in referring to his writings, I should have been content to rest the cause on them alone without a single word in addition.

On the whole, I cannot but think that when the arguments, illustrations, and authorities here adduced are maturely considered, they will be found to involve such various and forcible objections against the doctrine they were designed to combat, as fully to satisfy even those who have never before attended to matters of this kind; and as to the learned, they already understand the thing too well to join issue on this score. If the reader be in fact convinced by what has been offered, I would then beg him to reflect how extensively the error in question has spread, and how firmly it has maintained its influence—how constantly it is employed in recommendation of classical studies, and how much it has been countenanced by scholars. With all this before him, he may become perhaps somewhat sceptical whether other arguments in behalf of such studies, to which he has hitherto lent a willing ear, may not be equally vulnerable.

CHAPTER III.

The languages no guide to English Grammar.

THAT an acquaintance with the dead languages, especially the Latin, is of use in imparting a more thorough grammatical knowledge of our vernacular tongue, is an opinion coextensive with that which formed the subject of the last chapter; though if possible a still greater fallacy. The most remarkable circumstances connected with this error appears to me to be, that there are hundreds of men, and we may add women, who, without any classical learning, understand their own language to a sufficient degree of accuracy; who might exhibit volumes of epistolary correspondence free from any mistakes of magnitude—who moreover are perfectly conscious of adequate proficiency in this respect—yet who believe, or talk as if they believed, that every thing depends on Greek and Latin. That *scholars* should often be under such a delusion is not half so extraordinary; because having been led by their very scholarship to investigate philosophically their native speech, they are naturally enough seduced into a belief that it was Latin which taught them English, though the most it ever did, or could do, was to suggest the study. This effect unquestionably is often produced, and the effect is a good one; but certainly no sound reason can be given why French or Italian should not do as much, or more, and with less sacrifice either of time or labour. Besides which, the end may be attained, as I shall show, quite as well, if not better, without the aid of any foreign language whatever.

The notion that classical pursuits may be serviceable in this way, has been countenanced, we all know, by innumerable desultory writers on the subject of language; and yet not one has ever given an explanation of the kind of aid they can supply. It has indeed been no where distinctly maintained, of late years, at least, that a man after having diligently studied the best English works on grammar, would be able either to speak or write better English, by superadding the knowledge of any foreign idiom. But though not definitely asserted, the idea is perpetually inculcated under every form of indeter-

minate phraseology, by all scholars, and by most teachers. And yet several of the most industrious labourers in the classic vineyard, so far from promising a harvest of this kind, have even discouraged such expectations. Dr. Gregory, for example candidly admits that Greek and Latin have no such effect; and a writer of high standing in scholarship (quoted in the introduction of Ross's Greek Grammar) confesses not only that the structure of our language may be well understood, but that a man may "compose in English with force, elegance, and precision, without classical learning." This admirer of the classics seems to rest the cause principally on the argument refuted in the last chapter.

If it were true indeed, that the knowledge of other tongues had any efficacy in respect of grammar, we should most naturally expect it from those which have the strongest analogy to our own; and in this view, almost every dialect now spoken in Europe might claim an advantage over Latin—for between that and English there is no affinity whatever. English is the simplest form of speech prevailing in Europe; whereas Latin is far more complicated than any of them. Latin also is the most transpositive language known, exceeding perhaps in this respect even the Greek—while ours on the contrary is the least so of all. In short, between English and Latin there is a striking, a total dissimilarity pervading their whole structure.

But it may be well perhaps, for the information of those who have never attended to Latin, (whose time, I should hope, has been better employed,) to enter a little into detail; because persons of this description, by adopting the opinions of others without any limitation, are the most apt of any to overrate the advantage of such studies. To this end we may first observe, that in Latin, all the important species of words (or parts of speech as called in grammar,) such as nouns, pronouns, verbs, and adjectives, undergo numerous changes of form according to the manner in which they are used. A Latin *noun*, for instance, has six cases, technically so called, which are distinguished for the most part by different terminations, serving to denote a few among the numberless relations that may subsist between the idea expressed by the noun and other ideas embraced in the sentence. In this way Latin nouns usually display six or eight variations of form. But in English all such relations are expressed, with one exception only, not by variations of the noun itself, but by separate words, bearing the name of prepositions, which effect the same ob-

ject with much less ambiguity. In like manner Latin *pronouns* have six cases with corresponding changes, and usually in addition to these, several other changes to mark the gender; whereas English pronouns do not vary a quarter so much nor in the same way. To give but one example, our pronoun *this* changes only to *these*; while the Latin word of similar import has no less than *fifteen* different terminations. With regard to *adjectives*, they retain with us precisely the same form, whatever be the gender, or case, or number; but in Latin most of them vary from six to twelve different ways. There are no words however, that undergo so many mutations as *verbs*; and here the contrast between the two languages is very remarkable. Latin verbs, in marking the time and mode of action, and in superadding other collateral ideas, travel through a prodigious circle of inflexions—exhibiting seldom less than seventy or eighty variations, and in general considerably over a hundred. Our verbs, on the contrary, admit only four or five changes of this kind, and then call to their aid ten or twelve short auxiliary verbs, by help of which they are able to express not only an equal but much greater number of accessory ideas, and that too with far nicer discrimination than is practicable in Latin.

From the foregoing sketch of the more conspicuous and distinguishing features of the two languages, it may easily be seen that Latin proceeds on the plan of combining several related ideas in one word—English, on that of separating those ideas, and expressing them by distinct words. Without stopping here to discuss the comparative advantages of these different modes of speech, on the score either of facility, precision, or elegance, I shall only offer an opinion that ours upon the whole is decidedly superior; and whoever will take the trouble of perusing carefully and impartially the celebrated essay of Dr. Smith on this subject; or the excellent treatise in the *Edinburgh Encyclopædia*, under the head of language, or even the inferior article under a similar title in Rees', I venture to say, will coincide in that opinion. However, the principles on which the two languages are respectively constructed, and according to which they must be used, being so radically different, not to say repugnant; and grammar being nothing more, *as admitted by all*, than those same principles embodied and digested in the form of rules, those rules cannot in such a case possibly resemble each other, nor of course afford any reciprocal aid. This conclusion would be readily assented to by any sensible unprejudiced man, even though

his knowledge extended no farther than the points above stated. But let him spend an hour or two over the Latin grammar, (which would be quite enough for the purpose,) and his conviction would be amazingly strengthened. He would soon see that out of about sixty rules in that syntax, only three or four could in any shape take effect in our language—while all the rest would be of no more avail than the rules of Algebra or Mechanics. Indeed, let him but imagine them placed in an English grammar, and he would at once say they were mere jargon. On the other hand, if he cast his eye over our own syntax, he could select at most five or six rules out of twenty odd, that could be even partially applied to Latin; the remainder being wholly intractable. Here then we have new and abundant evidence, that whatever else Latin may do for us, it can never teach us English Grammar.

As to Greek, it is unnecessary to say any thing, since its grammatical forms are well known to be yet more complex, and therefore more unlike our own. Dr. Campbell's remark is then perfectly true, that "English has little or no affinity either to Latin or Greek."

But to place the matter in a somewhat different light, what do we really learn, let me ask, in acquiring other languages? Nothing more, most certainly, than new words and new modes of combining them—we learn only another manner of expressing the same idea. To be sure, after some progress is made, and foreign books can be read understandingly, then of course, whatever information they may contain is opened to us; the importance of which, as far as classic tongues are concerned, will be discussed hereafter. At first, however, the acquisition is evidently limited, as just mentioned, to new expressions, equivalent in meaning to others before known—but though equivalent, they are wholly different, and can never be used, if we wish to be understood. Now it is quite impossible to conceive how knowledge of this description is to assist us in the right application of words and phrases already familiar. A man conversant with the mechanism of a watch—who knows how all its parts are fashioned and connected—who sees whence the moving power is derived, and how it is conveyed, would comprehend the instrument nowise the better by inspecting a steam engine, and finding every thing to be different. Just so is it with the English student. If he has thoroughly mastered the rules that govern his own language, as established by custom, and compiled by grammarians, (which can be done only by consulting these authori-

ties) he would have not a whit the better conception of them by learning those of any other tongue, or of all others put together. Such a recourse indeed would more naturally tend to mislead, or at any rate to confuse—It would much resemble the whimsical expedient fabulously related of Demosthenes, who, it is said, filled his mouth with pebbles *to assist his articulation*.

The numerous traits of discordance already noticed, as existing between Latin and English, though by no means all a close inspection might detect, would yet suffice, I have little doubt, to convince any one who would give his mind to the subject, that Latin can be of no service. But the great difficulty lies in inducing people to reflect on the subject. The larger portion, even of well informed men, do but follow the opinion of others in most things relating to education.

The measure before alluded to, of comparing the syntax of the two languages, would after all afford the best as well as the easiest test that could be adopted; and if parents would only take the trouble to do this, (which would really occupy but an hour or two) they would be convinced that the question lies quite within the scope of plain common sense; while at the same time they would perceive the utter absurdity of supposing that we speak good English only by indulgence of the Latin. However, even without any such comparison, and even setting aside all the foregoing representations as partial or exaggerated, no matter in what degree, the following conclusions would seem, in any view of the case, both unavoidable and irresistible; that when proper attention has been paid to our own language, Latin rules and forms of speech, as far as they agree with ours, must be altogether superfluous; and as far as they do not agree they cannot be availed of; consequently, *in either case* they must be useless. This I think can hardly be evaded.

There was a time, it is very true, when grammar could *not* be learnt but through the medium of ancient tongues, or from the practice of speech in society; when no books of elementary instruction in English existed; when in short our mother tongue was in a state of complete vassalage to Latin; and during that period the argument before us had some weight. Now, however, the rudiments of our language are displayed in forms almost as numerous as the stars in the sky—every year producing some new compilation. It is indeed astonishing what a variety of aspects a language so little complex

may be made to assume—rivalling almost the endless diversity of combinations which pass before the eye in that beautiful instrument of Brewster's. But as all the books to which we now allude teach English by direct means, teach it intelligibly, and teach it thoroughly, there is no ground whatever for the pretence that Latin is any longer necessary, or even advantageous.

Nor would this conclusion be at all weakened, as I believe, by appealing to experience—whether in comparing the proficiency of students at school, or the compositions of authors. As far as my observation has extended (and I certainly have not been backward in inquiry) lads educated at Latin schools, public or private, do not evince in general a better acquaintance with English grammar than others—perhaps not even so good; and it is no uncommon thing to hear parents express surprise at their children knowing so little of their own language. Complaints of this sort we know are not rare. For my own part I have no doubt whatever, if an examination was instituted between a dozen boys, after being three years at a good English school, and an equal number after an equal time at the Latin, that the former would discover a more philosophical and also a more accurate knowledge of their native tongue. It is to the purpose also to remark, that the two celebrated teachers formerly spoken of (Barrow and Knox,) though theoretically ascribing to classical studies an effect almost magical, both confess that many of their pupils who had distinguished themselves in Latin were quite inaccurate in vernacular composition. Experience, therefore, as far as relates to youth, tends to confirm our doctrine rather than confute it.

If, on the other hand, a comparison were made among authors, my belief is, that the writings of men skilled in classic tongues would not be found peculiarly exempt from grammatical imperfections. Were it not invidious, we might adduce in proof the productions of several eminent scholars of our own country, who, excellent as they unquestionably are in various respects, are certainly not the best models of grammar. It might indeed be justly remarked of more than one as Mr. Tooke remarks of Harris, "I say that a little more reflection and a great deal less reading—a little more attention to common sense and less blind prejudice for Greek commentators, would have made him a much better grammarian." Then as regards the celebrated scholars of England, whole volumes might be filled with extracts of bad grammar. In-

deed, whoever will take the pains to look over Lowth's, Murray's, and other books on this subject, may see many hundred such examples already collected by them to illustrate their rules of syntax. I shall refer, in addition, only to a few passages from Mitford's history of Greece, (and Mitford is a first rate scholar,) most severely and justly censured in No. 49 of the Quarterly Review—passages which exhibit not only the worst grammar, but the worst style imaginable :—And if any body will produce me a school boy of fourteen years old, who can write no better, I will undertake to prove that for every hour spent on English, he has devoted ten to Latin. When, therefore, we hear the votaries and panegyrists of ancient learning expatiate on its efficacy in making skilful grammarians, we must bear in mind that they have in view a degree of perfection which they themselves do not attain—a perfection, moreover, not indispensable either to fame or excellence. In fact, the grammatical refinement that many talk about, is an end hardly worth aiming at, whatever be the proper means. Such petty niceties have at best a low degree of merit. Numberless books of extensive utility, and even superior worth, have been written without their aid—for where good sense abounds they are not missed ; and where that is wanting, the utmost grammatical precision, even with elegance of style conjoined, will never secure a lasting reputation. These observations however are by no means intended to discourage a strict adherence to the genuine idiom of our native tongue ; every departure from which is in reality a corruption. They refer only to little punctilios, on the importance of which many a pedant will descant most volubly ; who yet entirely neglects them both in speaking and writing.

The considerations, thus far submitted, involve only the objection of *inutility* and the consequent loss of time implied thereby :—But objections do not stop here :—There is much reason to believe that Latin stands in a position not merely neutral, but actually hostile to grammatical purity. The following extract from the preface to Johnson's dictionary is fraught with sound sense :—“ A mixture of two languages (says he) will produce a third distinct from both ; and they will always be mixed, when the chief part of education, and the most conspicuous accomplishment is skill in ancient or in foreign tongues. He that has long studied another language will find its words and combinations crowd upon his memory ; and haste and negligence, refinement and affectation, will obtrude borrowed terms and exotic expressions.” Now this is per-

fectly true, and goes the full length of saying that Latin is injurious ; for when a foreign mode of speech is thus familiar to the mind, it will inevitably, though perhaps imperceptibly, blend itself with our own, and modify our forms of expression. Could the innovation be restricted to single words, it might be harmless, or nearly so ; but when *combinations* thus intrude, they necessarily infringe on the very structure of language, and cannot fail to be mischievous—anomalies become multiplied, and grammar confused. Such most certainly is the tendency ; perhaps the necessary effect. Hence, in point of accuracy at least, the study of ancient tongues is not simply useless, but something worse.

But after all, should any one still hesitate to allow the independence of our language to the full extent here described, I beg him to consult, not indeed any casual writer, but certainly any didactic author, who has treated systematically on this particular topic. The opinions of such authors are indeed so uniform, and founded on such incontrovertible arguments, that it is really one of the most singular things of the age—that doubt should still exist. And this is the more extraordinary, since the very men who are most frequently appealed to, as believing in the efficacy of Latin and Greek, may often be found pursuing a train of reasoning which shows them to be under no such mistake. In a review of Barrett's Grammar, ascribed to Professor Everett, we read a series of remarks (found here in the Appendix) on the structure of the dead languages as compared with ours, from which the conclusion is unavoidable that *in his view*, Latin, so far from doing good, has done much positive harm—that, distorted as English Grammar has always been, and is yet, by Latin forms, we are at this very time teaching our children little else, to use his own words, than “ Latin and Greek in disguise.”*

So also Mr. Pickering, as we have every reason to believe, both from his writings and his good sense, is exempt from the popular delusion. To say nothing of the general spirit of his amusing book before mentioned, he introduces, on a contested point of *construction*, the following quotation from Dr. Campbell :—“ The argument from etymology is here of no value, because taken from the use of another language. If by the same rule we were to regulate all nouns and verbs of Latin original, *our present syntax would be overturned.*”†

* See note A at the end.

† Pickering's Vocabulary, page 41.

Now by all this we may see that on the topic of grammar, as on most others, our better scholars understand the thing well enough, though they may not feel authorised to break in on the established system, by a free avowal of their sentiments. In the minds of many of them probably, the prevailing notion on this subject has long been regarded, what Dr. Ash does not scruple to call it, a *vulgar error*.*

To conclude, whoever will take the trouble to investigate the case, will find that every philosophical writer on grammar, without a single exception, instead of grounding his precepts on the Latin idiom, refers expressly to *custom*, such as obtains among reputable English authors, as the only means of determining what is proper or improper in the use of language. Lowth, Murray, Campbell, Johnson, and in short the whole circle of authorities, concur in this as a leading principle, and thus justify in effect, the main doctrine we have endeavoured to elucidate. "Grammar rules (says Rees) have no other foundation than the practice of those who speak and write the language." Let scholars then say what they please; the notion that Greek or Latin can *in any way* operate as an auxiliary to English grammar, is alike unsupported by good authority, or by sound philosophy. It is altogether a classical prejudice—a mere dogma of the schools.

It has now been made, I presume, sufficiently obvious, that the proper use of our own language is not to be learnt from ancient tongues. Whence then, some may ask, has arisen the contrary impression, so prevalent, and so tenacious? I have before observed that it is no part of our duty to trace an erroneous sentiment to its source. Whatever its origin, if it be proved a fallacy, our case is made out. But as an attempt to account for the favourable opinion of classical learning on this score, may unfold some of the principal causes of its high reputation in other respects, I am tempted to stray a little into this inquiry. Such an inquiry cannot be wholly devoid of interest; neither is it difficult of solution. The matter will be already half explained if we call to mind the circumstance of all our old grammars being fashioned after the Latin exemplar. Our early grammarians, who were certainly more of scholars than philosophers, and much better Latin scholars than English, finding already in use an elaborate scheme adapted to the Latin tongue, and presuming, too hastily, that a scheme so much admired would be the best pattern for us,

* Preface to Ash's Grammar.

adopted at once all its technical terms, and as far as possible its forms and classifications ; thereby forcing our language under restraints and shackles, to which its genius was wholly repugnant. It is unquestionably true, as Dr. Wilson well observes, that if the names of modes, tenses, and cases, had not been taken from the ancients, our elementary books would never have been burdened with them to the ridiculous extent they formerly were ; and all writers seem now agreed that a scientific knowledge of the language was for years, or rather for ages, greatly retarded by that unfortunate attachment to the Latin model.

Things remained in this state for a long space of time, till at length Dr. Lowth turned his attention to the subject ; and by a little work of his own, about fifty years ago, presented a more rational, because a more simple, view of his native tongue. He saw plainly that nothing but classic prejudice had so long held us in the trammels of the Latin ; for he says explicitly in his preface, that “ what is called learning, or an acquaintance with ancient authors ” will not help us in the least.

It is a very extraordinary yet well known fact, that down nearly to the period last mentioned, English grammar formed no part of a regular education. It was not taught separately, nor by rule ; but only incidentally, as it stood connected with, and illustrative of the Latin. What were at that time and are now called grammar schools in England, were founded for purposes of instruction exclusively in the dead languages—then considered almost the only thing worth knowing. The vernacular tongue was never admitted within their walls, nor is it at this day. The cause of all this however is not very mysterious. The great schools and colleges, owing as they did, if not their origin, at least all their extension and splendour, to classic predilection, lent their whole influence (powerful indeed it has been) to foster those partialities on which alone their support depended. A special article in their creed was, that the dead languages constitute the only proper foundation for an accurate knowledge of English ; and that if those were thoroughly learnt at school or college, the latter might be attained any where and at any time. So assiduously were notions of this sort propagated by some thousands of graduates annually emerging from academic groves, that in course of time they became diffused through every stream and rivulet of society—Hence the total neglect of the vernacular tongue, which, from being thought unworthy of culti-

vation, or even of analysis, was kept in a state of rudeness altogether anomalous amid the general improvements of the age. "Nothing was learnt (says Elphinstone, in alluding to the schools of that period) that was not Greek or Latin—nor could aught be grammar but the grammar of those languages." To crown the whole, not only were the elements of English to be learnt, if learnt at all, through the medium of Latin; but even the grammar rules of Latin were written and taught in *Latin words*; and to make the absurdity yet more glaring, those rules were many of them in *Latin verse*. If the reader will believe it, this same preposterous mode of teaching Latin continues to this day in the three great schools of England, where it is held fast bound by ancient forms and statutes, though long since expelled, by the dictates of common sense, from every private establishment in the kingdom—and it is this very mode which Dr. Knox applauds so extravagantly, in his book on education, as the perfection of mental discipline.

It would be impossible, perhaps, to point out another so signal example of bigotry in matters of education, since the world began; though to the eye of posterity, the veneration prevailing in our day for classical learning, may seem a parallel. The ancients themselves, enchained as they were by prejudices of almost every kind, are by no means chargeable with the egregious error of neglecting their own language for the study of others—the principles and structure of their vernacular tongue were ever the first and chief object of youthful instruction.

The remarkable degree of infatuation just alluded to, seems to us, at the distance of little more than half a century, scarcely credible—Yet is it matter of history, and might teach a salutary lesson *if we chose to read it*. There can be no wonder, under the circumstance described, that English was excluded from the public schools;—nor is it surprising that although numberless writers must have analysed the language for their own purposes of authorship, none were induced to compile a rational system of rules for the use of others. The formularies on the Latin model, beforementioned, went little farther than the classification and derivation of words; and thus while English grammar was groaning under the weight of Latin encumbrances, its syntax was not even reduced to rules. We see also that till within a few years of our own time, it was taught in no other way and for no other purpose than to explain the Latin. Now here surely was a powerful

cause, if not alone a sufficient one, for the supposed influence of the Roman tongue.

Since the period when Lowth wrote, Priestley, Murray, and numberless others, have presented the subject under new and various forms—retrenching many classic superfluities and abounding in explanatory observations; yet all too much resembling some imperfect cast from the Latin mould. In none do we find that degree of simplicity, nor those peculiar characteristics of the English idiom, which, since Tooke's researches, we had every reason to expect—which Mr. Everett has so well imagined, and might, *if he chose*, so well supply. In short, a *good* English grammar is yet a desideratum. Among the few who have thrown off all scholastic bias and examined the thing philosophically, is the Rev. Dr. Wilson of Philadelphia, whose learned essay on grammatical science exhibits in high relief the singular contrast between the Latin and our own. A more thorough, ingenious, and in all respects satisfactory work, is perhaps no where to be found. Mr. Noah Webster is another, who has pursued his researches in this walk of literature, quite unfettered by authority. His excellent dissertations contain abundant proof that English has in reality little or nothing in common with the Latin. These two writers may be very advantageously consulted by any who wish to investigate the subject more closely—as also an admirable treatise in the Edin. Ency. under the head of Grammar.

The next cause I shall mention as having contributed to give an importance to Latin in this respect, is the circumstance that many of our words had their origin in that language. From this single circumstance it was natural enough to infer, on a superficial view, and unquestionably it has been by thousands, that our *grammar* likewise must be derived from the Latin; or at any rate must, somehow or other, be dependant thereon: But nothing could be more delusive than such an inference. It is bottomed on the idea, that, in adopting new words, we must adopt at the same time new modes of combining them, which is altogether preposterous. If such a practice were followed, the scheme of every modern tongue would be reduced to a perfect chaos—to a heterogeneous assemblage of discordant combinations totally unsusceptible of rule or method. Indeed there could be no such thing as grammar in a language so made up, any more than there could be law in a country where every new emigrant was permitted to bring a new code. To ascribe any influence to Latin, there-

fore, from a notion of this kind, was engrafting one error on a still greater one—a morbid scion on a rotten stock.

But the utility of the dead languages in point of grammar, as far as the idea is entertained by men of letters particularly, is not unfrequently founded on a fallacy of yet another kind. They think that no language can be well understood without some knowledge of what is termed *universal* or *philosophical* grammar—an unfortunate appellation, to be sure, where *philosophy* has had so little to do. This science, if indeed it deserve the name, lies deep in metaphysics. Its object is to investigate the circumstances which gave rise to the diversified structure of different dialects; and further, to ascertain both the abstract nature of their several species of words, and the sort of relation that subsists between them. The ultimate end is to discover by these means what general principles, if any, are common to all languages. Speculations of this nature have no less occupied the minds of modern than of ancient philologists. But their inquiries being chiefly confined to the learned tongues, and those of modern Europe, have been too limited to elicit general truths—their induction has been grounded on much too narrow a basis:—Accordingly, many principles deduced by them as universal, fail entirely on application to dialects more recently analysed—a fact sufficiently evinced by the forms of speech (to say nothing of other examples) existing among the aborigines of our own country, as lately displayed in various publications. These forms of speech not only exhibit features altogether unknown in cultivated tongues, but, what was less to be expected, they possess powers, it would seem, in many respects superior. The multifarious inflexions of Greek and Latin, hitherto the delight of scholars, and the result, as *they* have always said, of matchless ingenuity and refinement, dwindle to nothing in comparison. Now the discovery of such unlooked-for peculiarities, such more than classical excellences, affords reasonable ground to anticipate, that in proportion as inquiries of this nature are extended, what were supposed to be universal principles will gradually disappear, and at length perhaps entirely vanish. So that universal grammar, which for more than two thousand years has puzzled the minds of the studious, may prove in the sequel, a mere nonentity. Ere long, perhaps, it will descend to the same tomb of oblivion with the philosopher's stone, and the grand panacea—but with this difference in their history, that *these* were always believed to exist though

never found, while *that* was thought to be found, yet never existed. A writer in the *North American Review*, sensible, apparently, that scholarship has run wild in this field of speculation, acknowledges "we have much to learn on the subject of universal grammar;" but according to my notions, all we have to learn is, that there is no such thing. Dr. Wilson does not hesitate to call it a *chimera*—and Campbell says much the same.*

Perhaps, however, some would contend that the object of this science is to determine as well the points wherein languages differ, as wherein they agree. If, indeed, this be the case, or as far as it is, no science was ever in a more flourishing state.

It was, unquestionably, those assumed universal principles, on which we have just remarked, which Dr. Beattie had in mind (and so with other writers) in saying that "the *grammatical art* cannot be so well learnt from modern as from ancient tongues." But as in fact there are few principles of that nature, probably none at all, the expression becomes nugatory—nor would it be *true*, if there were ever so many—because whatever principle be universal, must of course be found in our language as in all others. The Doctor's notion therefore is, in either view, but a sprig of error plucked from the classic stock.

There is yet another circumstance by which the idea of classic aid, in respect of grammar, has been greatly strengthened. It is an excellent remark of Bishop Hurd's, and none the worse for wanting novelty, that "the source of bad criticism, as universally of bad philosophy, is the abuse of words." Much akin, if not precisely the same, is the *influence of terms*—the real, though secret origin of mistakes innumerable in all departments of science, and in this among the rest. The term *grammar*, having been appropriated to denote that systematic arrangement of the elements of speech, and that assemblage of rules, which teach its proper use, men have been led to believe that the *thing itself* must in all cases be the same, or nearly so. But this is a great mistake—Grammar is one thing in Latin, another in Greek, and a still different thing in English, and every other dialect. In some languages, indeed, the Chinese for example, the very phrases we use in grammatical treatises (modes, tenses, cases, &c.)

* Campbell's Rhetoric, B. 1. chap. 4.

which make so great a figure in Latin, and have caused so much confusion in English, would be totally without meaning ; because nothing there exists to which they could be applied. The grammatical art is in fact a *distinct thing* in every language ; often, no doubt, having many points of resemblance, but quite as often, none at all.

To the various causes here enumerated, several others might be added ; but every reflecting reader must ere this be fully satisfied, that the prevailing classical opinion on this subject, may be abundantly accounted for without supposing it has any foundation in truth. He may at the same time see a little how it is that *a whole system* has been entailed on the present generation, which even to our grandsires must have been an onerous burthen.

CHAPTER IV.

The dead languages no benefit to style.

THE topic next proposed for consideration is the alleged tendency of the languages to infuse grace and elegance into English composition ; or as the phrase goes to *give a polish* to our English.

This idea under one form or another we find almost invariably appended to every notice of the classic tongues ; and it is done with less scruple, because the constituents of style being in their very nature occult, and perhaps undefinable, any thing may be either affirmed or denied of it, without much hazard. To discover the ultimate principles of beauty in any class of objects, natural or artificial, has hitherto baffled the most ingenious and most philosophic inquirers ; and in all that relates to style, their failure has been more complete than perhaps any where else. But I would ask the reader if it ever has been explained to him, in what way Latin carries on the polishing operation. For my part I have never had the good fortune to hear or see any thing satisfactory on this head ; though not for want of search or inquiry. But let us endeavour to ascertain what the argument really means, and how far it is valid. The word *polish*, as also its

synonyme *refine* (the favourite terms on such occasions) we all know have only a metaphorical application to language ; and their meaning is to improve, or make better. With regard to improvement, every body knows that in point of copiousness our language is indebted for its unrivalled superiority, to many others, and to Latin among the rest. For the last century, however, few new obligations have been incurred, and in future there is likely to be still less. English has long been equally copious with the Latin, and indeed much more so.

What is meant by the argument in question, is not that our style may be improved by the adoption of new words, for this is now deemed inadmissible, except in extraordinary cases. It is meant only, as we may presume, that a familiarity with Latin will enable us to use our own language, such as it is, with more propriety and elegance—a desideratum no doubt ; though in what way Latin is to teach this better use of English, I would very willingly be informed. One thing that may be confidently affirmed is, that the promised amelioration cannot consist in a nicer adaptation of words to ideas ; for it has been already proved, that the true import of words, in any of their various applications, cannot be sought for in Latin. As little can it consist in a more suitable or more elegant arrangement ; for this falls within the province of our grammar, which has been likewise shown to be quite independent of the Roman tongue, and remarkably dissimilar. It is therefore, neither in the choice of terms, nor in their collocation, that Latin can help us. But it is precisely on these two particulars and on nothing else, that perspicuity, force, and accuracy, wholly depend. And does not elegance, I may ask, and every other quality of style depend on the same ? If not, I should be glad to know of what elements they are composed. In my view of the subject, the question of style is very nearly settled by the preceding discussions on grammar and etymology.

Let us see, however, what are the means by which ancient tongues are *said* to effect the supposed improvement. To take the words of one of their warmest admirers, it is done “ by imbibing the spirit, and by imitating the beauties and the harmony of ancient writers.” This is the sort of phraseology commonly used. But classical men certainly ought to know, and those who mingle the smallest portion of philosophy with their scholarship do know, that what are esteemed beauties in the dialects of Greece and Rome, *cannot*, for the most part, be imitated in modern tongues ; nor even those of one mod-

ern language by another. This I say, is, or ought to be, known to scholars. It was well known to their great file leader, Dr. Knox, and is candidly acknowledged by him in his Essays, though very likely not in his book on education. "The matter (says he) may be preserved, the ideas exhibited—but the manner, the style, the beauties of diction, which constitute more than half the excellence of the classics, *can seldom be transferred to modern tongues.*"* The inflections of Latin words, so prodigiously admired by some folks, it is evidently out of our power to imitate, for we have nothing like them. The most that is feasible, is to copy the Latin mode of arrangement; and this we see often accomplished, though always attended with the same constraint and awkwardness as mimicry of personal manners. In no case can it be graceful, and as far as indulged in, just so far will ease, elegance, and taste, desert the English page. Every semblance of beauty will vanish, and it will be well if much of the sense do not vanish likewise. Let any one read a dozen pages in Gordon's translation of Tacitus, and he will see the folly of that species of imitation. To give those unacquainted with the subject some idea of the Latin form of sentence, we may take the following specimen from the work just named—"To Pallus, who was by Claudius declared to be the deviser of the scheme, the ornaments of the pretorship, and three hundred thousand crowns, were adjudged by Bareas Soranus, consul designed." Or this, "still to be seen are the Roman standards in the German groves, there by me hung up." Or the following from a translation of Homer; "Tepolemus, the race of Hercules, brave in battle and great in arms, nine ships led to Troy, with magnanimous Rhodians filled." Well may Tytler, in his elegant essay on translation, call this *barbarous*—yet in nothing but such cruel distortion of sentence can either Latin or Greek be imitated. It is hardly possible to conceive that the case admits of any thing more; and surely to dress up English after this fashion, is like attiring a modern belle in the ruff and stays of Queen Elizabeth, or a modern soldier in a coat of armour. If however more be practicable and at the same time expedient, scholars will be kind enough, I hope, to tell us in plain terms what it is.

On the other hand, however, it would be absurd to deny that the learned languages have charms of various kinds;

* Knox's Essay, No. 159.

though we may safely say that to discern and relish them, requires a proficiency that not one in a hundred attains at College, nor one out of ten who pursue the study in after years. The fact is, each and every language may boast of some traits of perfection, not found in so great a degree, or not at all, in any other. Each has peculiar forms of construction, which strike a foreign student agreeably, chiefly because they are *novel*;—because he sees the same end accomplished by new means—by an apparatus entirely different from his own. This pleasing effect, according to Sir W. Jones, is greater from the Sanscrit, than from Greek or Latin; and for that reason, it may be, more than for any other, he thought it superior to both. He thought the same of the Arabic, as others again have of the Persian. So also that eminent linguist, Mr. Duponceau, is enraptured with the native idiom of the Delaware Indians, which superabounds, it seems, in beauty or novelty of the true classic mould. “The Greek is admired (says he) for its compounds, but what are they to those of the Indians?” Indeed, if a systematic structure, highly compounded and inflected, be admitted the criterion of abstract beauty, (as scholars have generally contended,) classic tongues will bear no comparison with the *unpolished* dialect of our tawny inhabitants of the forest, or even that of the sooty tribes of Africa. Nor could these perhaps, vie at all with the written language of China.* But in all such cases, I conceive *novelty* to be the leading principle by which the taste of a foreigner is excited. As viewed by a native, the graces of languages are referable to various other principles, and more important ones, especially that of association; though novelty perhaps will always come in for a share.

Adverting again for a moment to imitation—now and then some over-zealous defender of the system will carry the joke so far as to tell us that we should follow the ancients in their *manner of thinking*—but the fate of Aristotle’s syllogisms, and Plato’s phantasms is a loud warning against the advice of such enthusiasts.

With regard in the next place, to the *harmony* of classic tongues, nothing is more extraordinary than to see this so constantly held up as exquisite and unrivalled, when scholars themselves are not agreed *even in what it consists*. This very harmony, strange as it may seem, has been the source of per-

* See Note B. in the Appendix.

petual *discord* among the learned ever since the revival of letters. They know neither what it is, nor what it was : some say it depended on length of syllables ; some on accent ; others say on both ; and others again on neither. But, as it happens, *all admit* it was a very different thing from what we realize and admire in modern tongues, and depending, as Mr. Adams observes, on different principles. How then, in the name of common sense, can it be imitated in English ? It is well known, indeed, that the whole scheme of Prosody taught in our schools, and which boys are compelled to learn, (as far as its inherent mystery, and absurdity will permit) is a *mere hypothesis*—and we know further, that in the opinion of those who have examined it most thoroughly, and written most ably, it is a *false hypothesis*. Not to enlarge on the topic here, I would merely ask how it is possible so much as to conceive of such a quality as harmony, where the true pronunciation and sound of a language are confessedly lost, without a vestige remaining. And further, such mighty pretensions to harmony are nowise reconcilable with another branch of the same system—the received theory I mean, of ancient *accents*—for if this theory be true, (which by the way I do not believe a word of) those languages, instead of being melodious, must have been the most miserable sing-song that ever was spoken. Be all this as it may, however, there is not the least reason to suppose, that Homer or Virgil had at their command any greater resources in this way than Pope or Racine—or that they used what they had with any better effect.

But because modern tongues are incapable of exhibiting beauties of a similar kind, are we hence to infer that taste is excluded ? By no means. Their powers are yet more extensive, and their graces more pleasing, as is evinced by numberless productions in our own language. Pope's Iliad, for example, contains a thousand captivating charms of expression which not Homer himself could have displayed in Greek, nor Virgil in Latin. Do we want authority for this opinion ?—we have it, among others, from the pen of an elegant critical writer on the subject of translation. “It would be endless (says he) to point out all the instances in which Pope has improved on the thought and the expression of the original. Even its highest beauties receive additional lustre from the pen of this admirable translator.” Dr. Gregory also remarks on this same version, that it is “richer in every poetic beauty than the original.” Quotations of a similar character relating

to various modern writers, both in poetry and prose, might be multiplied almost indefinitely. The whole matter in debate too is susceptible of a much fuller elucidation than our limits will permit.

Now that poetry has been touched upon, we may glance a moment at the effect of classical studies on poetic imagination—and the following extract from Bishop Hurd's *Essays* will place the matter in its proper light. The author is speaking of the natural proneness to take a tincture from the writers we are accustomed to read, and he makes these reflections:—
 “Hence a certain constrained, and unoriginal air, in some degree or other, in every genius thoroughly disciplined by a course of learned education—which by the way leads to a question not very absurd in itself, however paradoxical it may seem, viz. whether the usual forms of learning be not rather injurious to the true poet, than really assisting him.”* This question, he goes on to debate at too great length to be here copied; but the conclusion at which he arrives, (the great point for us) is, that such studies are absolutely *injurious*—and among his reasons, the principal one is, (which the reader will keep in mind I hope) that the powers of invention are checked by the perpetual exercise of *memory*. He instances in particular, the poetic genius of Addison, as suffering from this cause, and so no doubt it did. Indeed, the effect is visible in a large majority of modern poets; who instead of giving wing to imagination, and rambling freely through the regions of fancy, have contented themselves with hovering around the ancient votaries of Apollo—with culling out their petty conceits, and grouping them anew. Nor is Hurd alone in this opinion. Those great German critics, Brucker, and Schlegel, the French critic, Sismonde, with many more, have reasoned after the same manner; and we have Spence's authority for saying that Pope “thought himself in some respects better for *not* having had a regular education.”† And yet, strange as it may seem, we find a learned professor of our time, urging the necessity of going *deeper into Greek* for the very purpose of “obtaining for our country a higher classical and *poetical* character.”—(*North American Review*, No. 28. page 213.)

Let us turn now to some arguments on the classic side, of a more practical nature.

* Hurd's Works, vol. 2. page 220.

† Spence's Anecdotes.

There is one circumstance so emphatically dwelt upon in proof of the refining properties of Latin, as to deserve particular attention—which is, that the major part of those who have written well in English, have been more or less acquainted with classic tongues. This, as a mere fact, may be conceded, yet the conclusion usually drawn from it denied; for I beg leave to ask if the same may not be said of bad writers, as well as of good; and which, I pray you, are the most numerous? If the bad predominate, as many think, the influence is by no means favourable to scholarship; for the chance is they would have done better without it. Indeed, several might be named, whose genius and acquirements were such as would assuredly have placed them high on the roll of fame, had they not wilfully neglected the cultivation of taste, in their native idiom, to chase the phantom on classic ground.

In some departments of literature, that of belles-lettres particularly, no doubt the most celebrated authors were adepts in Greek and Latin. But it should be remembered, at the same time, that they were men endowed by nature with extraordinary talents—that their minds were enriched, besides, with varied and extensive acquired knowledge; and that it is this knowledge and those talents which give value to their works, and celebrity to their names, infinitely more than elegance of language, or the graces of composition. Nor should it be forgotten that among this very class of productions there are many, in the paths of romance, deservedly of high repute, whose authors received no varnish from Cicero or Virgil. Among the *unclassical*, indeed, may be ranked some of the most captivating novelists and dramatists of any age or country—such as Richardson, Inchbald, Radcliffe, Burney, Edgeworth, (to say nothing of Shakspeare,) and many others—whose superiors we should vainly seek, I fear, in the endless catalogues of collegiate graduates. The case is the same in various other branches of science and learning.

Nevertheless, it may be true in the main, that a good English style is usually accompanied with some portion of classical learning: But admitting the proposition; yet its converse—that those who are skilled in ancient tongues can always acquit themselves well in their own—is very far from being true; as might be shown by a long list of exceptions. This however ought to be true according to theory. Nor does it follow, even when these attainments are found conjoined, that one is the cause and the other the effect. Both may be, and

it is reasonable to suppose they are, concurrent effects referable to a common cause. They result jointly, I conceive, from the operation of favourable circumstances on a mind by nature acute and capacious. Such a mind, so circumstanced, is naturally stimulated by curiosity, (the inseparable adjunct of genius,) to grasp at every thing within its reach. Wherever its possessor be located, here or in Europe, classical studies not only soon fall in his way, but are almost forced upon him by the fashion of the times. Of the dead languages, therefore, he makes an early acquisition, though never a rapid one: Simultaneously or successively, other branches are diligently pursued; his native tongue is critically analysed; till at length a rich and diversified stock of knowledge is amassed; and in this way he becomes a proficient, both in science and learning. It is *not* that ancient languages have refined his own; but the whole has been alike matured by the same eager desire to attain, and the same sagacity to comprehend. This, in all probability, is the true cause, most certainly an adequate one, of the coincidence alluded to; and when the effect may be accounted for in a manner so natural and satisfactory, why should we strive to explain it by a mysterious tutorship of Latin over English, of which no one can form a distinct conception?

But in my opinion too much weight has been attached to the circumstance of so few good writers (comparatively speaking) having been known to the world, who were *not* classically educated. For in the first place, the number of such who *have* written well, may in point of fact be greatly underrated; and secondly, as to those who *can* write well, this is obviously a matter of conjecture only. Thousands, no doubt, have silently descended to the tomb, whose intellectual powers, if called into action, might have at once delighted and instructed mankind. How many "mute inglorious Miltons" now rest in their graves we shall never know. Besides, the world is seldom anxious to learn the history and education of authors, unless it be such as have displayed a wide scope of knowledge, or uncommon penetration. Hence numbers, possessing equal, if not superior, merit in respect of style merely, may have passed quite unnoticed.

Perhaps, however, some judgment may be formed on this head in another way. Let any one survey the circle of his acquaintance, and he probably will find among them many individuals of both sexes, in whose epistolary and other manuscript performances, subjects have been treated not only with

ability, but in a suitable, agreeable, and even elegant manner. He might call to mind also many good specimens in print, on fugitive topics, by persons who were strangers to Latin ; and in the muses' domain particularly, numerous effusions, not simply neat, but *polished* too, from the pens of females. He might point likewise to a successful bard of our own, who, though *not* one of the *alumni*, has thrice borne off the prize before a whole phalanx of regular bred expectants. Or finally, he might refer to the pages of our leading critical journal, in which one of the best essays for the last two years, perhaps the very best, in style as well as talent, was the transient effort of an *unclassical* penman—of a mind, however, improved by better means than conjugating Latin verbs, or measuring Latin verses.* By this sort of survey, any one might be convinced that, among those who have *not* had what is called a liberal education, the number is far greater than is generally imagined, who are able, when they choose, to express just and pertinent thoughts in forcible and elegant diction—and what is this if it be not good writing?

There is a well merited compliment of Dr. Gregory's as regards the sex, which comes directly in aid of our argument ; for it is the good fortune of the ladies, generally speaking, to be exempt from the drudgery of classical studies. "The style of female authors (says he) flows easier, and is commonly more harmonious than that of professed scholars." As a general remark, it is just—We have a notable exception, however, in Miss Seward's *Memoirs of Darwin*—a style of composition so stiff, so awkward, and so highly latinised, as to exemplify fully another observation of the same critic, that "pedantry more frequently misleads us than any other cause." Whether the fair authoress was familiar with the tongues of other times, we are not informed. But, manifestly, she knew the characteristic of a Latin sentence to be inversion ; and by endeavouring to mimic this in her native speech, has made a willing sacrifice of ease, of grace, and what is worse, of perspicuity.

The object in these latter remarks, was to call to mind the fact, that many writers have arrived at eminence without any obligation to the languages ; and at the same time to suggest, that hundreds of others may have been amply qualified, yet have not chosen to appear before the public. These points,

* See North Am. Rev. Oct. 1822. Article 18, written by a merchant of this city.

however, need not be much insisted upon. The case imposes no necessity of adducing authors of this description, equal either in number or fame, to their classic rivals. We may allow a considerable disparity in both these respects; and can assign a sufficient cause, apart from the languages. It is well known to be our custom here, as in Europe, to select for literary promotion those children to whom nature has been most bountiful—the motive for which, whether justifiable or not, is as natural as it is obvious. Accordingly, the youth placed under classic tuition unquestionably possess, on the average, the strongest minds—in addition to which (it is important to remark) they are better taught in all other branches, as well as in the languages. Furthermore, while their companions are called off to new employments at the age of 14 or 15, these prosecute their studies to 18 or 20—a period of life incomparably more propitious to the accumulation of knowledge than the playful years of boyhood. All things thus co-operating in their favour, these youth constitute, in every sense of the phrase, a *corps d'elite*. Is it then extraordinary they should make better writers? Can we expect the same exploits from common soldiers as from picked troops; or look for an equal product from field husbandry as from garden tillage?—I may add too, for no one will doubt the fact, that the very notions so long prevalent on this subject, have operated to discourage most others from making any attempts at authorship, at any time of life.

Taking all these things into view, we surely need not be at a loss to account for the high standing of classical men in the republic of letters. Nay more, where such manifold advantages have concurred, we might reasonably expect a greater effect than is actually found; and that no greater is witnessed can perhaps be explained in no other way than by supposing that the confused ideas obtained through Greek and Latin perplex the mind, and thus obstruct that expansion of genius which would naturally keep pace with the accumulation of general knowledge. In my belief this is really the tendency of classical studies; and however numerous may be the examples of men thus educated, who have made themselves conspicuous as authors, they have succeeded, probably, not in consequence of such learning, but in spite of it.

Another favourite expedient to evince the efficacy of ancient learning in ameliorating the taste and the judgment, is to refer us to some celebrated English writer as a case in point. Among them all, Addison, is more frequently selected

for this purpose, than any other ; and he, poor man, has been roundly accused of plucking all the fairest flowers in the classic garden. But whatever were his robberies in this way, the blossoms of style were certainly not among them. His graces of manner are all of home growth. Being, however, consummately skilled in Latin, the policy has been to refer all his excellence to that cause, and thus exemplify the magical effect of Roman models. An inference more thoroughly gratuitous, I venture to say, was never made.

Addison is acknowledged on all hands to be an easy, elegant, and most entertaining writer ; fully deserving, perhaps, the high eulogium which Johnson, with peculiar felicity of expression, has penned for him. His latinity also, was no less correct and elegant than his English ; but the chief merit of both consists as much in the idiom of each being kept perfectly distinct, as in any other circumstance. The change of style brought about, or rather accelerated, by the taste and influence of the Addisonian school, so far from being an approximation to the Latin manner, was effected by discarding numberless uncouth turns of expression, and that stiff ungraceful structure of sentence, which earlier writers had fallen into by aping the ancient classics. It was by carefully avoiding all this ; by restoring the characteristic simplicity of the English idiom ; by giving scope to a fertile, yet chaste imagination ; and by opening the resources of a highly cultivated mind ; that the author of the *Spectator* diffused a charm through all his writings, which, while it never fails to fascinate the reader, bears no resemblance to any thing we inherit from antiquity. It is risking nothing to say, that no productions in our language are more strictly English, or, if the expression be allowed, more completely *unlatinised*, than those engaging essays—not a sentence can be found after the Latin manner. If therefore, the dead languages were any benefit to Addison, in respect of style, it was by teaching him what to avoid, not what to imitate.

But what was the style, let me ask, of those among Addison's predecessors, who *did* imitate the ancients ? Professor Barron accurately describes it as follows—"They disfigured our language in every respect—they latinised our words and our terminations ; and they introduced inversions so violent as to render the sense often obscure, and in some cases unintelligible."* This indeed was the fashionable manner among the

* Barron's Lectures, vol. 1. page 47.

great body of English writers at one period ; and we have here a farther confirmation of a former remark, that although the Latin form of sentence may easily be copied, it must always be at the expense of almost every pleasing quality.

Indeed there is little room to doubt that this whole doctrine of imitation, so unsuccessfully put in practice by the writers last mentioned—so servile too in its very nature—yet so pertinaciously urged upon us at every turn—is built entirely on a false foundation. It rests on the unauthorized assumption that the principles of taste, in matters of style, are universal, and common to all languages ; which is exactly the same mistake as before noticed in grammar. But scholars of a higher cast (that is, of stronger analytic powers,) have long been aware of the fallacy ; and in many instances have taken some pains to unmask it. “ If we consider the works of literature (says the German critic Schlegel,) by any *universal* theory of art, there is no end to the controversy that may arise as to the merits of any individual book, or of any body of literature.” The critical acumen of this philosophical writer is employed at some length in exposing the pernicious tendency of the very error in question ; and he points out various ways in which the study of classic models had a most unhappy influence on early European writers, English as well as others—but above all, on the Italians.* Another critic of no less celebrity, Sismonde, is so entirely of the same mind that he ascribes the degeneracy of Italian literature in the 15th century, to nothing else but the passionate study of the ancients, which, to use his own words, “ caused the neglect of their own language, and took away all originality from their authors.” Italian, he says, was not cultivated for fear of spoiling their Latin ; and thus, through neglect on one side, and classic imitation on the other, gross corruption awaited it.† In England also, when the classic mania was at its height, the effect was precisely similar, as we have already seen by the quotation from Barron.

It would seem then, the very history of literature might itself admonish us, that the plan of imitation is as ruinous to taste, as it is to originality. But independently of all reference to facts, it needs but little reflection to convince any man that the standard of taste, like that of grammar and meaning, is in every language inherent, peculiar, and untransferable. It is

* Schlegel's Lectures, vol 2. pages 23, 90, and 96.

† Sismonde, vol. 2. page 23 and 24.

quite time then to abandon the puerile idea of polishing English with Latin tools. We might as well believe a carpenter could polish his work with the tools of a mason. There is no fitness in the instrument.

It is not intended however, by any thing here said, to deny that there are certain elements of beauty in literary composition, which being independent of language or expression, might properly enough be called universal, and therefore, if you will, transferable—such as beauty of morals, of sentiment, of passion and the like. But unfortunately, the ancient classics are in general so extremely licentious, not to say disgusting, as to be wholly unfit either for the school or the parlour, without a severe expurgation—and even then, how little consistent with modern ideas of propriety. “I know not (says Spence) what to say of one thing, that Homer makes *dissimulation* one of the *excellences* of his heroes.” And see how he accounts for it, “but the heathen system of morality (he adds) was incomplete enough to bear with this proceeding.”

But another thing, is it not quite frivolous at least, if not incongruous, to talk so much about the ancients in bulk, as models of style, when their respective manners are so extremely various? Scarcely a point of uniformity exists among them, excepting only the national idiom, which it is impossible to transfuse into modern tongues, without rendering them altogether uncouth and heterogeneous. And further, is there not something very singular, and contradictory withal, in pretending that excellence is unattainable but by imitation; and telling us in the same breath that the Grecians were no imitators, yet excelled in every thing? One would think the very inconsistency of such a theory was enough to discredit it.*

Let us, however, for one moment fall in with this theory and see where it would lead us. What if there *are* universal principles in literary composition. What if Addison and others *have* discovered those principles, and transferred them to their own pages—what follows?—Most certainly this—that these same English masters exhibit to us the *very* principles so much extolled; and what is more, they teach us likewise, what never could be learnt from the ancients, *the manner of applying them*. Now which is best, to learn an abstract principle and nothing more; or to learn, together therewith,

* See note C. in the Appendix.

its proper application ? This aspect of the case, seems quite as conclusive against resorting to Greek and Latin as any other.

Or let us take the thing, by way of variety, just as scholars will have it. Suppose it conceded, that the study of Latin is really the *best* means of accomplishing the object, and even the *only* means. No one can imagine that a slight acquaintance with that language would answer the purpose—our knowledge of it, and of its writers, must be at once critical and familiar. With this in mind, we must consider on the other hand, that great precision, or great elegance of style, cannot be important to any but *professed authors* ; and even to them worth nothing in comparison with good sense, sound judgment, and above all, a competent knowledge of their subject. These latter qualifications, indeed, would of themselves naturally form a manner, which, though unembellished perhaps, could never be had ; and if it fell short in elegance, would abundantly compensate in perspicuity. Nor must it be forgotten, that, in devoting so much time to the classics, other studies of high value must be partially or wholly neglected. If then, combining all these circumstances, we contrast the improvement thus derived, with the sacrifices made to attain it—if we compare the value of the polish with the cost of the polishing instrument—we could hence draw but a very feeble argument indeed in favour of such a course, even for literary men—while as a *general* system, there could be no favourable inference whatever.

But lastly, if we consult that class of writers who have investigated the elements of composition, and profess to give instructions on that score, we shall find them all concurring in the doctrine of an *inherent* standard, and in referring to approved models in our own language. Among the many who have written with this view, we may cite Mr. Kett of Oxford—a staunch friend to classical studies, and a tutor at college—yet as independent in his opinion, as perhaps any man would venture to be, so situated. With regard to style, he observes, “ It should consist in a compliance with general rules, and the practice of polished ranks in society. Without attention to some rules, without a proper discrimination between good and bad, the language will degenerate, and the English tongue will finally lose its value, its weight, and its lustre, by being mixed with *foreign words, and the alloy of learned affectation.*” He says in another page, “ In order to avoid the errors of those who have been led astray by affectation and false refinement, (among whom he ranks Gibbon, for his numerous

latinisms) and to form a proper opinion of the genuine English idiom, it is necessary to peruse the works of the best and most approved writers." And he adds elsewhere, after naming several English authors, "such are the examples by which our style ought to be regulated."* From these quotations it is evident enough that Mr. Kett, however abounding in classic partialities, is yet sensible that the true criterion for us can nowhere be found but in our own mother tongue—a conclusion, in which every inquiry, pursued on philosophical principles, must unavoidably terminate; and one that rejects, as entirely fictitious, the pretended agency of Greek and Latin. It is with great propriety, therefore, that Mr. Pickering, in his Vocabulary, alluding to certain English authors, subjoins "such standard authors should be made the foundation of our English." Mr. Pickering indeed, goes all lengths with us in this matter, and quotes a distinguished transatlantic Review, by way of corroboration.† At least, thus I interpret him—if erroneously, no one is better able than himself to state his real sentiments, and the grounds on which they rest; and no one can do it in a more agreeable manner.

The reader has now before him all that was proposed to be said on this topic; and I cannot but think he will come to the conclusion that the common scholastic doctrine is not to be maintained on any principle of sound reasoning.

And where, after all, is the propriety of such unwearied attention to the petty artifices of style, by whatever means acquired, as the supporters of that doctrine insist upon. Do they mean to say that mere taste, and a conformity to certain arbitrary rules, are the sole, or even the chief ingredients in good writing? Has sense, and intelligence, and reflection, nothing to do with it; or is this the portion of those only who worship at the shrine of Cicero and Aristotle?

There certainly does appear to be some cause for apprehending that the characteristic of literary performances in our day, will seem, to future critics, to be that of *pretty writing*—the besetting sin is *manner*—and this perversity of judgment results naturally from the prevalence of classical notions. To abate the evil, our votaries of the plume would do well to listen to the advice of Duncan—"Whether composition (says

* Kett's Elements, vol. 1. pages 104 to 108.

† Preface and Essay in Pickering's Vocabulary.

he) be grave or light, humourous or satirical, let it be remembered that beauty consists more in idea than expression; and that it is not inflated language, but propriety of thought, which constitutes a good writer."* They would find an advantage also in recurring now and then to the admonition of our great English critic, that "compositions, merely pretty, must have the fate of other pretty things, and be soon quitted for something better;"†—that is to say, for something where sense and knowledge predominate, and where style could do but little good on the one hand, or little harm on the other.

CHAPTER V.

Classic literature, of little value as a source of knowledge.

It is a dominant article in the classic creed, that the languages open to us an inexhaustible store of knowledge. Dr. Rush remarks on this point, very happily, that we seem to forget the *age* we live in—he might have added, and the *age also* to which we are referred for instruction; for before any weight can be allowed to this argument, we must draw a veil over the whole history of knowledge. But it would be whimsical enough to imagine ourselves enveloped in a cloud of ignorance merely that we may ascribe to Aristotle the honour of dispersing it. What indeed can be more visionary than to attempt to enlighten the present age by the glimmering rays of ancient science—it is like carrying a taper to Vauxhall.

But let us cast our eye back to the time when classic light was restored. There was a period in the history of Europe, as we all know, and a very long one, when book learning, and still more book making, were entirely out of fashion. Of modern works there were none; while those of ancient Greece and Rome lay concealed in convents and cloisters, unread and unsought. The minds of men, long weaned from such pursuits by the operation of powerful general causes,

* Duncan's Essay on Genius, page 180.

† Johnson's Life of Waller.

political, ecclesiastical, and moral, were at length allured again to literature by causes no less remarkable ; among which, the invention of printing, and the reformation in matters of religion, effected by Luther, were the most conspicuous. To these events, must chiefly be imputed what is termed the revival of letters ; or in other words, the renewed taste for books and literature :—Cotemporary therewith, or nearly so, (but whether as cause, or effect, or reciprocally both, is uncertain,) was the discovery of ancient manuscripts in their various secret repositories throughout Europe. By aid of this discovery, the growing taste for study was no doubt prodigiously stimulated, and possibly in some measure rewarded—though it is far from being certain, that useful knowledge, or even speculative science, was in the smallest degree advanced.

What may reasonably excite a doubt on this point, or rather perhaps completely disprove it, is the well attested fact of many very striking, and indeed wonderful discoveries and inventions, having occurred antecedently to the revival of learning ; or at any rate, ere that learning can be supposed to have had any influence—far less *such* influence. The inventions of paper, printing, clocks, watches, spectacles, telescopes, of the compass, of gunpowder, of arithmetical figures, and many other things, are *unequivocal* indications that the human mind, however averse to literary parade, was far, very far, from being inactive during what is called the middle ages. Indeed, what force of genius ; what depth of reflection ; what extent of knowledge too, is implied in all this ! Can the long annals of Greece and Rome show any thing on a par with these, I might almost say any *one* of these improvements ? If they can, I confess my ignorance, and desire to be enlightened. As to the wild day-dreams of their visionary philosophers, or the rhapsodies of their poets, orators, and historians, it is all quite insignificant, compared with the efficacy of these discoveries, in promoting the every-day comforts of life, and in ameliorating the general condition of mankind. Now in all this, and much else that was accomplished about that time, ancient writings had positively no agency whatever. The truth is, the minds of men were already roused by other causes ; ingenuity was busy at work ; and for all we know, the progress of science in the two following centuries, rapid as it really was, might have been incalculably more so, had not genius and industry been called off to the musty manuscripts of earlier times.

Mr. Harris in his *Philological Inquiries*, alluding to the fore-mentioned *admirable inventions*, as he properly terms them, calls it all *surprising* ; and so indeed, it would be on his theory of a prevailing ignorance at that period, and even *impossible*.

It is even a questionable thing if the substantial parts of knowledge were lost during *any* portion of what are usually stigmatized the *dark ages*. Schlegel declares his conviction they were not ; and as to the era in question he remarks, " Among the suddenly enriched, and intellectually fruitful periods of modern Europe, the most brilliant, perhaps, was that of the 15th century." Why then call that a dark age ? Dark it may have been, if we consider only the literary art—the art of *displaying* knowledge—but luminous almost beyond description, certainly far beyond any thing the world had *before* seen, in the brightest efforts of intellect—the discoveries in art and science. Undeniably, Europe was at that very time superior in many important respects to the best days of Rome or Greece. Who can believe that classic nations would have made any figure by the side of a people in possession of the arts above enumerated ; and possessing moreover, the genius that created them. Nevertheless, a notion has prevailed, that mankind were in a state of hopeless ignorance at the revival of ancient learning ; and I am not aware that *scholars* have taken the least pains to expose this " hoary-headed error."

An error it most certainly was, and its origin may at least be guessed at. There is in mankind a propensity to endeavour to account for every thing, and it is a fortunate one ; but there is likewise a propensity to simplify causes, which often is very unfortunate. These tendencies combined have led men, in countless instances, to assign to some particular ostensible cause, an efficacy a thousand fold greater than was just, or even rational. To take an example, that political phenomenon, the French revolution, was for many years, as we may all remember, considered the work of half a score of able, factious, and desperate demagogues. But of late the error of such an opinion is clearly perceived ; and wise men of every nation, and of all parties, now more justly ascribe the whole to extensive moral causes, for a long time silently, yet actively operating throughout that ill-fated country. Precisely in the same way, the natural propensities alluded to, have induced a general belief among moderns, that the astonishing advances in knowledge and civilization, which characterized the

15th and 16th centuries, all flowed from the introduction of classical learning into Europe. The whole state of things then existing was thought to be explained by the magical phrase *revival of learning*. And the charm in some measure, still operates—those potent little words are still made to resolve every thing—accounting not only for all that could possibly be learnt from ancient writings, but also for many magnificent discoveries, of which the Greeks and Romans were as completely ignorant as the Choctaws or Cherokees. But surely that must be a wretched philosophy, which refers effects so vast and so various, to the trivial circumstance of a few Greek volumes being discovered, and a few Greek teachers having fled into Italy from the East. It is in every respect more rational to impute all this to a happy concurrence of *moral causes*, which, in the desire to make every thing redound to the honour of Greece and Rome, have been much too generally overlooked. But men, it seems, have willingly gone blindfolded to the classic altar, that they might worship with better grace.

However, at the epoch referred to, the passion for reading came again into vogue; and as fashion has great sway in every thing, even in the exercise of the mind, and books being then scarce to a degree of which it is difficult to form an idea in the present age, studious men at once became absorbed in the new found treasures; and soon after became enthusiasts. All knowledge and refinement were *thought* to lie under cover of the dead languages, and all learning (as the term is generally used) *did* lie there. The deductions of science, the maxims of wisdom, and the charms of wit, were considered as locked up in Greek and Latin; and to possess the key of so rich a casket might well be deemed a compensation for some years of toil. Hence ancient tongues were universally studied as valuable means to a valuable end. The whole thing was natural enough, and possibly *some* good may have resulted from it; much evil most certainly has.

But if Europe, at the period in question, stood so little in need of classic aid as we have described, how must it stand now? Not only has the march of mind gone on with accelerated step, but the storehouse of antiquity has been made to yield up all its treasures, (if so they may be called) and therewith much also of its worthless ware. At least as far back as a century from our times, perhaps much farther, every thing valuable in ancient literature had already either been translated, or culled out and incorporated in English works;

and the same labour has been continued on minor topics down to the present day—so that now it is quite idle to pretend that any thing of consequence yet remains concealed from English readers. Whatever heathen writers can teach, in any respect useful, we no longer need their language to avail of. The ore of ancient knowledge, in its original form, is now therefore of little worth. The pure metal has been separated and refined, and as far as it was capable, made subservient to useful purposes. Why then should we spend years and years in delving at the crude mass in ancient fields when all its better elements are found in our own territories, without alloy, and with little trouble.

Notwithstanding, however, the unwearied industry of scholars, in bringing to light every thing really estimable in the productions of classic times, their gleanings have furnished but a small part, an exceedingly small part, of the mass of wisdom embodied, and digested in modern literature. This I had thought of showing, by drawing a brief comparison between the ancients and moderns in the more important branches of science and learning—but the most compendious sketch that could be devised, to be at all satisfactory, would spread too wide for the present occasion. It may suffice to say, that no view of this kind could fail to exhibit the complete ascendancy of the modern world. This indeed is not denied. It is not pretended that either Greece or Rome could at all approach, in the sum total of useful productive knowledge, or even of speculative. Dr. Knox himself, whatever language he may hold as tutor, admits all this as an essayist. “A man (says he) may have read the best Greek and Latin authors, and scarcely have one just and truly philosophical idea of the orb on which he lives, or its natural and artificial productions.” And again, “In useful science, and in natural philosophy, the ancients fall so far short as not to bear a comparison.”* In fact, so immense is the difference, that it would be quite on the safe side to affirm, that every boy in his teens may now be in possession of a greater amount of *profitable* knowledge, than fell to the lot of the seven wise men of Greece—and as to the *unprofitable*, it can well be spared. The only wonder is, that fully sensible of the astonishing change, as we all are, a system of education should still be tolerated, which imposes a dreary pilgrimage through the

* Knox's Essays, No. 22 and 69.

wilderness of antiquity, to seek what no one believes can be found.

Very frequently, however, and very naturally under these circumstances, classical men expatiate on the importance of certain *accomplishments*, in which, they say, the ancients excelled. So far am I from stopping to contest this point, though extremely doubtful, I should freely allow not only all they assert, but as much more as they may choose to claim of that nature. Useful attainments are so immeasurably superior to what is simply amusing or ornamental, that the latter is not even worth computing. To take the words of one, who, besides scholarship, has many better things to boast of, "For it is not the parade of learning, like the display of an elegant philosophical apparatus, that we are called to admire, but the useful *application* of that learning." And Cicero himself (a good authority with some people) was aware of this—"Knowledge (says he) that is applicable to no useful purpose cannot deserve the name of wisdom." And he is right enough, for of such knowledge, one might say what has been said of skepticism, that it is the *science of knowing nothing*. In short, learning that cannot be applied, is like money that will not pass—with millions in his coffer, a man would still be a pauper.

And yet there are men, who, from long indulgence in habits of antiquarian research, are led to believe that classical pursuits, unlike all others, should not be measured by the scale of *utility*. An ingenious writer on the pronunciation of Greek, assures us, that *scholars* will not stop to inquire if such disquisitions be useful; and for this he is complimented, or intended to be, in the North Am. Rev. as displaying "*the genuine spirit of scholarship*." Without pretending to judge in the case, I have only to say that it may be scholarship, and it may be genuine; but I must be excused in adding it is *not* philosophy. Another set of scholars, however, it is but fair to state, hold utility to be not so bad a thing—"The *uses* of a thing (says the Literary Gazette, No. 4.) begin to be the measure of its value; and it is not a little in praise of the intellectual condition of the world, that it has done something towards establishing *the great truth* which lies at the bottom of all wisdom—that no knowledge is valuable, no acquisition worth making, and no action of body or mind good, but as *they* subserve the actual interests of humanity, &c." Now all this, though rather verbose, is sound philosophy—philosophy too, of a description, that, if once brought into full play, would soon conduct to the tomb a long retinue of academic whims and prejudices.

In matters of study, more even than any others, the well known motto, *cui bono*, should never be out of sight. Utility once discarded, what test shall we have; what other *could* we have? But to resume.

So vast have been the accessions of knowledge in latter ages, yet so regular the progress, that even the period when ancient learning *ceased to be useful*, seems itself almost lost in the shades of antiquity. Infinitely more than Greece or Rome ever knew, has long been embraced in every language of modern Europe; and not only so, but is there expounded in a manner far more satisfactory.

All this is unquestionably true, and cannot be gainsayed. On the other hand, however, we must not withhold from antiquity its just meed of applause. Every age and every people have done something for posterity. The Egyptians, Grecians, Romans, and far more than either, the Arabians, have transmitted certain arts and sciences in a state of considerable advancement; of which our ancestors of modern Europe (those same Gothic people so much reviled by scholars) very wisely availed themselves. This mass of knowledge they perfected, and handed down to us; together with many new branches, originated and matured by themselves, as also a brilliant train of inventions of peculiar excellence. But observe, it would have been just as rational in them to overlook the science of Arabia, Rome, or Greece, and seek intelligence among the relics of earlier nations, as it would now be in us to neglect the full treasury of modern tongues, and betake ourselves to Greek and Latin. The cases are exactly parallel. Nor should it ever be forgotten, in speaking of our Gothic ancestors, that we owe to them, and to them *exclusively*, several leading principles and features in social life, of inestimable value to our present happiness; as likewise the renunciation of many abominable practices and traits of character, by which the classic age was brutalized. Among such things it may suffice to mention here—the restoration of the female sex to its proper standing in society—the abolition, nearly entire, of domestic slavery, tenfold more inhuman among the Greeks and Romans, than in the West Indies, or elsewhere, at any period—many valuable maxims and customs in the science of government—and above all, that bulwark of our personal rights and liberties, the trial by jury. From these ameliorations, aided by the benign influence of christianity, has resulted a state of society and of manners, compared to which, the classic age was *truly* barbarous. And yet, merely

because the Greeks and Romans were a *literary* people, with something of a taste for the fine arts, the fashion among bookish men has always been, in repugnance to every principle of justice, to lavish their praise on *them*, while they have loaded with abuse those Gothic nations of the middle period, who have bequeathed us a far richer inheritance. But this is part of the game.

Modern systems of knowledge, for reasons assigned, have a claim to our preference, founded on the most rational grounds. At the same time, however, if we are desirous to learn the state of science in former ages, the labour of translators has placed this likewise within our reach, and freed us from the danger of being misled by the ambiguities of a foreign and complicated language. It is worth remarking too that a version in the vernacular tongue is attended by another advantage, founded on the very nature of the human mind, which yet perhaps has not received the attention it deserves. It is this, that as we all *think* through the medium of our native speech, whatever ideas are imbibed through the same channel are retained by more numerous as well as more powerful associations; and hence are always more at our command.

But it is curious to observe how men, interested in the reigning system, cry out against the unfaithfulness of *translations*, and how little consistent they are on this point. They talk of it as a thing for the most part impracticable to clothe becomingly a classic thought in modern dress, and always as somewhat irreverent to tear off the vesture of antiquity. Mr. Kett seems not a little puzzled what to say on this head. He allows our language to be “energetic, rich, and copious”—possessing withal a philosophic character of construction. He confesses too, that Latin is wanting in copiousness, and that Cicero himself complained of its meagre resources. Yet in the very face of these concessions, he takes some pains to instil the belief that no translation will convey the true meaning of the original. Barrow and Knox, as might be expected, rail lustily against versions of every kind, good or bad; but they rail in vain, for the image of the Latin teacher is visible in every page.

Here a reflection presents itself, of which all who have had occasion to consult authorities on such matters will appreciate the truth. It is a great misfortune that most didactic writers, on subjects of this nature, have been men who not only lived

“under the shelter of academic bowers,” but who derived their emoluments from offices connected with the support of ancient learning. Thus situated, a propensity on the one hand to applaud classical studies; and the dictates of truth and justice on the other in restraining such applause; have often entangled them in a dilemma from which it was hardly possible to escape but through vagueness or inconsistency:—Whence it happens that these qualities are generally conspicuous in writers of this description. In Mr. Kett’s book the effect and its cause are both very discernible; and so with Barrow, Knox, and many others. When, therefore, we meet, in such a writer, with sentiments or reasonings discordant with each other, we may safely take to be *sincere* whatever opposes his general doctrine—still more, if it opposes his interest; and since every thing of this kind must have been admitted reluctantly, and with great caution, we may also consider it as *true*. It is on these principles we proceed in the ordinary affairs of life; and the practice is founded in common sense. These considerations will apply exactly to many of the authorities already quoted, as well as to others not yet named.

But with regard to the capabilities of the English language, the following extract from Campbell will show the opinion of a man free from constraint of any kind, and in all respects a competent judge:—“The materials, (says he) which constitute the riches of a language must always bear some proportion to the acquisition of knowledge made by the people. For this reason, I should not hesitate to pronounce that English is considerably richer than Latin, and in the main, fitter for all the subtle disquisitions of philosophy and criticism.”* So likewise Professor Barron says of English:—“In point of precision and accuracy it is superior to Latin and equal to the Greek.” Our dictionaries too, attest its ample resources, for while classic tongues exhibit only about 30,000 words each, Johnson presents us near 50,000, and some other lexicographers many more. Thus we see how totally groundless is the common-scholastic dogma, that our mother tongue is poor and spiritless—incapable of reaching the compass of thought in classic literature. It is not so;—The difficulty of translating most certainly does not lie here:—Whatever obstacles occur, and enough there surely are, arise from the obscurity *inherent* in ancient writings—owing partly to indistinctness of idea, and

* Campbell, page 432.

partly to an ambiguity characteristic of the language. It is indeed a well known fact, that both these impediments exist to a most discouraging extent—they meet every student at the very threshold of his labours, and attend him obstinately to the close. Nothing less than extraordinary talents united to the most indefatigable perseverance (such as translators have usually manifested) can have any chance of surmounting them. A few perhaps of the higher grade of scholars, who, in addition to their collegiate course, have devoted many subsequent years to the classics, may do as well by reading them in the original; but nine out of ten, possibly ninety-nine out of a hundred, understand their author better in the form of translation. And this is the case in poetry yet more than in prose. The unlearned reader may then rest assured, that he loses nothing of the sense by perusing Homer and Virgil in the pages of Pope and Dryden; while on the other hand, he enjoys a harmony of versification, which can never be realized from the original, by what Mr. Pickering calls our *barbarous* mode of pronouncing Greek; or what Foster, Horsley, and fifty others consider our still more barbarous practice in Latin. I would only remark here, by the way, that the change of pronunciation, proposed by these writers respectively, would mend the matter not one atom.

The very uncertainty of meaning, of which we have just been speaking, and the depth of research thereby necessarily required, are alone a sufficient reason why time should not be wasted on ancient authors in the original. And as to the extent of the evil, no better evidence need be wished, or could be had, than the confession of a laborious scholar of our vicinity, who, with abilities worthy a higher aim, has passed at least twenty years of his life between Alpha and Omega. It is avowed by him, that a cloud of vagueness overshadows the whole of Grecian literature—and no doubt the same may be said of the Roman. “The imagination faints (says he) under the mass of illustrative learning, necessary to a perfect comprehension of their works.”* And again, in an Essay on the study of Greek, while deploring the unceasing labours of scholarship, he tells us that “by far the greater portion have given up the undertaking in utter despair.”* Now all this is perfectly true, though in fact nothing more than numbers had already believed, and not a few before confessed. A declaration, however, so manly and independent, considering the

* North Am. Review, No. 30, page 187—and No. 3. New Series, page 209.

writer's sphere of action, should justly entitle him to our warmest applause. In fact, the determination of this point alone, (that little accurate information can be gained from ancient authors) by one who has been favoured with peculiar opportunities of judging, since it goes far to repel every pretension to usefulness, nearly settles the whole question; and could the public be prevailed on to use the hint as it ought to be used, by expelling all this ancient vagueness from our schools, we should then indeed, owe a lasting obligation to the candour of its author. I mean not, however, to insinuate that such an effect was intended; for the disclosure may have been accidental only—but at any rate the truth is told, and told by him. The misfortune is, that confessions of this nature are apt to pass unheeded, merely because they are casual; whereas, in just reasoning, this very circumstance, by precluding suspicion, should entitle them to a degree of consideration above any number of *ex officio* opinions, propounded with the express view of upholding a system.

According to this writer's account, the classics are arrant coquettes, courting admiration from all, but permitting familiarity to none.

From causes such as have now been hinted at, the stubborn problems that start up around us as we endeavour to penetrate the mysteries of ancient learning, are as countless in number, as they are refractory in their nature. To decypher and elucidate has been the unprofitable occupation of thousands and tens of thousands of commentators, whose lives and talents, if wisely directed, might doubtless have rendered important services to their fellow men. The case of Aristotle may evince the truth of our present remarks. Among the philosophers of old, none could boast higher renown than the subtle Stagirite; nor is there one who so long and so triumphantly swayed the magic sceptre of opinion over moderns; nor yet one to whose works the superior order of scholars have so unremittingly devoted themselves:—Among these we may rank the distinguished author of *Hermes*, and Lord Monboddo, together with a long list of others, both English and continental. Edition after edition has been laboured, with almost pious zeal, by individuals and by associations, accompanied with folios of commentaries; as if the world had no security, nor mankind any hope, but what depended on a just conception of heathen philosophy.

Last of all in this goodly train, comes Dr. Gillies, who published a new version of that noted sage, with copious annota-

tions in 1797 ; and who appears to think himself equal (and probably is so) to any of his predecessors. Now Gillies not only affirms, but as many think, has *proved*, that Harris, Monboddo, and Hobbes, as also Rapin, and divers French literati, had grossly misunderstood their Grecian oracle on many cardinal points. Here then we see that although whole lives, almost, of the greatest critics in Europe were spent on a particular author, yet the chance is, he was not understood after all ; and even that he is not understood now. This may seem nothing wonderful to scholars, because they know it is not uncommon ; but what may well surprise both them and us is, to find Gillies asserting after all this, that the language of Aristotle, so far from being obscure, is the “ most copious and complete, and also the most precise and elegant ever employed by any philosopher ”—Yet so he says. In this curious case, though but one of a multitude, we see exemplified the insurmountable difficulties in ancient tongues, and a deplorable misapplication of modern genius. Why then should we go on, age after age, adding to the mass of time and talents already buried in this gulph of oblivion.

With respect to the general merits of that prince of Grecian sages, they are sketched by the learned Brucker in a few words, as follows :—“ As the result of the brief survey we have taken of the philosophy of Aristotle, it may be asserted that it is rather the philosophy of words than of things ; and that the study of his writings tends more to perplex the understanding with subtle distinctions than to enlighten it with real knowledge.”* How completely is all this verified in Aristotle’s commentators. And yet, how true soever it may be of him, it would scarcely be less true of the whole tribe of ancient dreamers.

Whoever supposes that the usual extent of classic tuition in this country will impart to the student even a tolerable understanding of ancient authors in the original, makes a capital mistake at the very outset. To get some idea of the magnitude of the task, we have only to see what the thorough-bred scholars of Europe deem requisite to its accomplishment.

Doct. Holmes, President of *St. John’s* College, Oxford, tells his pupils (who, it should be observed, usually enter that University with a deeper knowledge of the languages than is possessed on *leaving* ours) that preparatory to a collegiate

* Brucker’s Hist. of Philo. by Enfield, vol. 1. p. 307.

study of the classics, they must be well versed not only in the languages, but in the geography, history, laws, manners, customs, and I know not what else, of ancient times. Of all this, he says, "we must not be ignorant if we propose the classics should be of any use or benefit to us." Here we have already a noble field marked out for the classic aspirant; but this is not half. The Doctor goes on to say that "*thus prepared*" the classics may be advantageously read in the following order: "in Latin (I quote his words) Plautus, Phedrus, and Terence *an hundred times*," and then twenty-one other authors specifically enumerated. Here we see the field of ambition is somewhat enlarged. The Doctor, however, adds to the list fifteen Greek writers who are likewise to be carefully attended to—making altogether about forty authors, whose works collectively would amount perhaps to four or five hundred volumes. These are to be studied, he says, with great care, noticing all the peculiarities of each writer, both as to idea and expression; and keeping a common-place book for remarks—He further enjoins that students should constantly exercise themselves also in translations and compositions; and takes care to caution them that the study of the Scriptures must be diligently pursued at the same time. Lastly, he urges, on his pupils (which seems to me the only rational part of his advice) the necessity of joining their constant prayers with his *for success in this undertaking*. I leave it, however, to the reader to judge if any thing short of a miracle could ensure the accomplishment of all this, I do not say within the period of collegiate instruction, but within the common range of human life—and yet this thorough scholar assures us the classics are of *no use without*. The question then is reduced, according to him, nearly to the following shape—is it the sole end of human existence to understand the classics? Or, as the only other alternative, shall we study them but partially and not understand them at all? Such is the option the Doctor leaves us. We add only that his view of the subject seems fully to sanction the plaintive tone of a former quotation—that "the mind faints under the mass of illustrative learning" necessary to become a real scholar—which, extravagant as it may seem, is yet a solemn truth.

But apart from ambiguity, pagan literature (original or translated) considered as a source of intelligence, is embarrassed by other serious difficulties;—one is, that a large portion of what is there related as fact, is deprived, from various

causes, of that degree of certainty, without which no one can or ought to be satisfied. In historical matters this is particularly the case—so much so that the utility of the study is in a great measure intercepted by a mixture of fact and fable so intimate as to leave us quite in doubt what to credit or what to reject. The discordancies among Roman as well as Grecian historians even on important points, (to say nothing of subordinate) relating to their own and preceding times, are no less perplexing than numerous. But were they much less frequent, daily experience might still teach us that a single disputed fact has often so close a connexion with others better substantiated, that the whole becomes vitiated as legitimate grounds of judgment:—One link being broken, the chain is no longer entire. The certainty that classic history is in some measure fabulous, and the uncertainty in what degree, go far to divest it of every thing that might serve as lessons of experience, because the essential characteristic, truth, is wanting. In short, it partakes the fiction of romance, without its fascination.

History, indeed, of all kinds, considered as furnishing rules of conduct, can no otherwise be regarded, generally speaking, than as deceptive and unsafe; for as Chesterfield, with great good sense remarks, “there never was a case stated or even known by any historian, with *all* its circumstances; which, however, ought to be known in order to be reasoned from.” And as to events in remote times, even their most material circumstances are variously described. Ancient history, therefore, will seldom serve any other purpose than that of amusement; and this too not of the most edifying kind. In truth, the friends of the classics are fast dropping off in this particular. Even the veteran champion, Knox, who takes the field on most occasions in their defence, abandons them here as a forlorn hope; “Herodotus (says he) one of the earliest historians, writes a romance almost as fictitious as Don Quixote but not near so ingenious nor entertaining—and yet he is called the father of history; he might as well be called the father of lies.” And again “Your true classical historian feels no difficulty for want of matter: *when he finds it not, he makes it.*”^{*} If indeed it was important to my argument to show the worthlessness of early pagan history, the task would be nearly taken off my hands by the recorded

* Knox's Winter Evenings, 8th.

opinions of men, who, though brought up with all the attachments of a classical education, became at least partially weaned from its influence in after years. Two or three such opinions will at any rate not come amiss: "We must consider (says Johnson) how little real history there is—I mean real authentic history. That certain kings reign'd, and certain battles were fought we can depend upon; but all the colouring, all the philosophy of history is conjecture."* Mr. Heron observes on the same subject, "History is merely a species of romance, founded on events that really happened; but the bare events as stated by chronologists are alone true;—their causes, circumstances, effects as stated by historians, depend entirely on the fancy of the relater"†—Or take the following from a recent English periodical; "The critical science of history was not known to the ancients; but easy or ornamental narration—great and prominent events, boldly and strikingly brought out by the skilful colouring of the writer, satisfied the demands of every reader."‡ Such quotations might be multiplied without end.

But I go a step farther, and maintain that were every single fact known and fiction entirely discarded, still ancient history would be a most unsafe guide to present conduct. The axiom, that like causes produce like effects, though unquestionably true in the abstract, and practically available in physics, becomes almost nugatory in morals, and wholly so in politics—the reason for which may be found in the extreme difficulty, not to say the impossibility, of appreciating either cause or effect. It is another axiom, or rather common saying, (from which indeed the former seems to derive its plausibility in matters of history) that human nature is every where the same. But this likewise is not true in any practical sense, if it be true at all. Of the human character in its embryo state, (if I may be allowed the expression,) that is, as man comes into the world, no idea can be formed. What is meant by human nature, if it means any thing, is the character of man as affected by education, habit, and the numberless influences attending social life. Now all this, so far from being the same, we know to be every where different; and between periods far apart, or nations far remote, it differs astonishingly. This is too plain to need illustration. Hence no sound moral-

* Boswell's Life of Johnson Vol. 2. p. 373.

† Heron's Letters—p. 216.

‡ Monthly Mag. Rev. of Cicero's late work.

ist or politician would venture to take any assigned cause and effect as described by Thucydides or Livy and argue that an effect precisely similar would now result. This would be absurd. It is common enough, to be sure, to hear a young orator expatiate on something that Cesar or Pompey said or did; to show us what we ought to do now. But such things are merely the manœuvres, or at best the flourishes of eloquence. This sort of game, successful enough I dare say in the popular assemblies of Rome and Athens, where nine out of ten could neither read nor write, will at most but amuse a modern audience without convincing their understandings. Such trickery now is always laughed at.

In descending nearer to our own times, the annals of history may no doubt be consulted with more propriety, and for a twofold reason—because they are better authenticated, and because the period treated of bears a closer analogy in manners, laws, and customs, to the age we live in. For these reasons a reference to events of recent date may frequently suggest a course of conduct well adapted to present emergency. Yet even modern records, to be rendered profitable, must be studied and reflected upon, not simply read.

With regard to the *moral* tendency of historical writings in general, the common idea is that they leave on the mind a salutary impression. But whoever will peruse an elegant and sensible dissertation on this subject in *Walker's Essays* (Rev. Geo. Walker) we venture to say will have many doubts—as far at least as the ancients are concerned. The Edinburgh Reviewers have very justly characterized the whole retinue of Greek and Roman story tellers as “*superficial teachers of wisdom and marvellously indifferent to vice and virtue.*” It is a little comforting to see truth and reason thus occasionally bursting the fetters of prejudice; and as we hail their image with delight, I may be indulged in giving another quotation from the pen of these same gentlemen. “The admiration of Rome, (say they) is one of the worst heresies we bring with us from school; and it cannot admit of doubt that the elegance acquired from an early intercourse with ancient authors is dearly purchased by the perverted notions of glory and greatness generally imbibed at the same time. A wise teacher of youth will always endeavour to counteract impressions favourable to the character of the Romans, by representing them in their true colors, as a selfish, perfidious, cruel, superstitious race of barbarians, endued with the scanty and doubtful

virtues of savage life, but deformed by more than its ordinary excesses."* Here, reader, is a faithful picture of that celebrated people, on whom many still doat with unmeasured partiality.

The essay whence this passage is taken is admirably well adapted to dispel existing delusions; and it is particularly referred to, with equal candour and judgment, in Everett's defence of Christianity, *for this very purpose.*† The sentiments it contains are called by him *wholesome* sentiments, and very properly, because they declare the *truth*—the reader will judge if they accord with what he is accustomed to hear on that topic. The admirers of antiquity however need not suspect the learned professor was about playing truant to the cause. In that instance, it should be recollected, he was acting the part of a christian advocate, where the dignity of his subject would naturally overrule all questions of policy. More recently, it must be owned, he is wont to touch the classic lyre in sweetest notes of praise. Had he chosen to corroborate the argument he was pursuing in the case alluded to, he might have obtained an apt quotation from one equally skilled in classic lore, and equally aware of the horrible vices that disgraced the classic age. "How barbarous (says Bolinbroke) were those represented to be who broke the Roman Empire, the Goths for example, or the Lombards; and yet how much *less barbarous* did they appear than the Greeks or Romans—what prudence in their government—what wisdom in their laws."‡ He might have recollected also what Johnson said of the Romans, that "when they were poor they robbed mankind, and when they grew rich robbed one another."

Such then were the Romans; and if any one imagines the Grecians, when justly represented, would appear to better advantage, let him peruse the last essay in No. 51, of the Quarterly Review, where he will find a portrait if possible yet more disgusting. The truth really is, that of all civilized people, ancient or modern, the Greeks and Romans were the most morally debased, and by all odds the most politically corrupt. "Their generals and officers (says Heron) were abandoned to a sensuality that disgraces the very name of man—while Pindar, Sophocles, Eschylus, and others of their learned men, were given up to a vice too black to mention."§

* Edin. Rev. vol. 21. p. 378 & 396.

† Everett's Defence. p. 437.

‡ Bolinbroke's Works vol. 4. p. 47.

§ Heron's Letters, p. 318.

But unfortunately, such is the system we follow that all this is carefully concealed, at least for a time till the pride of scholarship takes root; and the ancients are held up to our youth, during the whole course of education, as models of every thing that can dignify and adorn human nature. Thus we actually practise deception to induce them to leave what in my judgment were better unlearned; and thus sentiments are infused the very opposite to all that is true, or fair, or even *wholesome*. These are *facts* in the case, appealing directly to common sense as well as common honesty; and the conclusions to be drawn from them are sufficiently obvious.

The defects already noticed in classic literature, of the fabulous on one side, and the obscure on the other, could hardly fail, one would think, to subtract largely from its value with all who consider *truth* an essential ingredient.

But it may be also remarked, in continuation, that independently of what is known to be fabulous, or of what is discordant, or of what is ambiguous, there are by no means a few matters of fact, so called, which, though free from these objections, are exposed at least to great doubt, if not total disbelief, from their own *inherent incredibility*. One thing of this kind, eminently curious in itself, and having been well treated by a late excellent scholar, and still better philosopher of our own, (yet partial enough to antiquity in all conscience) may serve for illustration. I allude to the institutions of Lycurgus, and their influence on the Spartan nation, as explained by Fisher Ames.* As the ancient story goes, that people exhibited a political phenomenon, unlike any thing that ever existed before or since—the wonder of the world from that day to this. It is well known that all the old writers concur in representing the military discipline and civil constitution established by the Spartan law-giver, as having been in full force over the whole free population of the State—that the system imposed by him was unspeakably vexatious, disgusting, and tyrannical; but at the same time such as to excite in the whole community a sort of passion, as it were, for self-denial, restraint, and suffering—and we are further told that this lasted seven hundred years—thus displaying a miracle far surpassing all others on record. Such is the view of those far-famed institutes, in which, let it be observed, all classic authors agree. But if the reader could be persuaded to peruse Mr. Ames's essay, he would be perfectly convinced that the

* Ames's Works.

story as a whole, however sanctioned by ancient writers, is preposterous to the last degree. In what respect Mr. Ames's solution has been anticipated by others, my own reading does not inform me; but it is evidently given by him as new. Many have thought the old account incredible, and Rollin among the rest—yet all have gone on to transcribe the whole story from Plutarch and others as if it were perfectly true.

Mr. Ames's solution is this—that the austere education and rigid discipline of the Spartans, of which we have heard so much, instead of extending as the ancient tale assumes to the whole people, was confined to the aristocracy and the soldiery—classes already existing and governing the State before the time of Lycurgus—that the design of his code was, by enuring *these classes* to mental exertion, to fatigue, to privation, and thereby making them really superior as men, to fit them for the duties either of the field or the Senate; and that the object of all this was to enable *them* to retain more securely a monopoly both of power and privilege, which they had long enjoyed, but which had latterly been endangered by popular commotions. This explication, by suggesting adequate *motives* on the part of those who actually bore the severities of that extraordinary scheme of laws, removes the grand stumbling block by which the old story is embarrassed; and it so far reconciles (as Mr. Ames shows) what before appeared anomalous and incredible as to win our full assent.

Lycurgus then, so far from being an enlightened and generous patriot, was the wily Machiavel of early times. Nothing was farther from his intention than to give to the Spartan nation a free and liberal government, for his whole ingenuity was exerted in devising new plans of despotism—perhaps, however, he was not the less a patriot; there was far too little intelligence among the people at large, and a great deal too much corruption to admit of rational freedom. At what epoch indeed in Greek or Roman history, do we find people enjoying that security of person and property, and that liberty of opinion and action, which *we* are accustomed to regard as the only evidence of a free government? At no time was there any thing approaching it. Sparta, it would seem by this explanation, instead of being essentially a republic, under a form somewhat monarchical, was always a despotic aristocracy. Instead of political liberty, there was only tyranny; and in lieu of patriotism as a ruling passion, there was little else among the higher orders than ambition, selfishness, and avarice; while among the lower reigned ignorance,

slavery, and vice. Such in reality were the prominent features of the Spartan character; to which, however, were united two others, equally conspicuous in the savages of our own forests—ferocious valor and political cunning. Yet by keeping the former traits out of sight, and unduly extolling the latter, the poets and orators of other days, backed by enthusiasts of ours, have held up to view an imaginary portrait of *Spartan virtue*, and called unceasingly on posterity to admire and to imitate.

The truth of the matter is precisely what our author states “Spartan virtue did not most certainly include morals”—that is to say it was *not* virtue in any sense. Well, therefore, may we apply to this and perhaps to every other Grecian commonwealth, a reflection of Hume on the Romans, “so depraved in private life were that people whom in their histories we so much admire.” If there be any thing at which exception might be taken in the masterly essay of Mr. Ames, it is the homage inadvertently paid to ancient error by *apologizing* for its exposure. How severe must be the requisitions of classic faith when it imposes so mortifying a task.

Now does not this Spartan fable prove that there are some things on which ancient historians are in perfect accord, which yet are undeserving of credit? And does it not further prove that a gross absurdity has been for ages received and sheltered rather than the authenticity of ancient traditions should be arraigned? This, however, is but one among numberless things of like nature in early history, which might disclose, on near inspection, the very seal and signature of fiction. Nevertheless such things are constantly talked about, are written, harangued, and reasoned about, as infallible truths.

There is, indeed, much room to believe, that many falsehoods, ascertained or suspected, are still upheld for no better reason than what Bacon suggests—because they supply commodious allusions. Matters of this sort, though really fables, are habitually referred to as facts, either in the form of metaphor to adorn a discourse, or of simile to illustrate—and thus invested with the garb of truth, they are handed down from age to age, like the Dutch story of the Bohon Upas, long after their falsity is detected. Of this nature precisely, as I conceive, is the reputed conflagration in the 7th century, of the famous Alexandrian library, by order, as the story runs, of the Caliph Omar, on whom classical men have been pouring out their wrath for the last half a dozen centuries. Gib-

bon, with several others, have treated the tale as fabulous ; and Drake in his "Literary Hours," has shown there is no ground to believe in any destruction of the kind.* True or false, however, an allusion to this event has served the turn of many an orator and many a writer, to smooth a period or balance an antithesis ; and I dare say it will continue to perform these important functions, for some years to come. Of Greek and Roman times, on the other hand, I might run over a long list of convicted errors still current in our schools as genuine matters of history. Upon the whole then may it not fairly be asked, how can records or narrations be entitled to any credit, where truth is so entangled with fiction and so difficult to be separated.

Indeed, as regards even the latest portion of the classic era, the very golden age of Roman literature, numerous are the questions in national affairs on which we have yet to seek elucidation. A writer in a late North American, who is as good a scholar probably, as any of his neighbors, sums up the matter as follows. "After all that has been written on this subject, (the Roman government,) it is *astonishing* how little is really known with certainty respecting it ; and how many points which one would expect to find matters of public notoriety, are very imperfectly understood."† For my part, however, I do not participate in this writer's astonishment. When we consider the entire absence of political and statistical science at the period alluded to, and before—the little science indeed of any kind—the interrupted state of communication between different nations, and different parts of the same nation—the total want of any rapid and correct mode of diffusing intelligence such as we now enjoy by aid of the press—the loose way of thinking then prevalent on all subjects, and the still looser way of writing—when we consider, in short, the scanty means which classic writers possessed of ascertaining facts, and the variety of inducements they may have had to misrepresent them, the greater wonder is, that we should know so much of those ages as we really do ; or to speak more properly, perhaps, that we should *fancy* we know so much.

However, the tide of delusion is perhaps on the ebb. Almost every late inquiry into ancient history seems to have expunged something from the catalogue of facts, to add to the

* Drake's Literary Hours, 33d Essay.

† North Am. Review, No. 40, p. 63.

scroll of fiction; and the time *may* come when little more will be admitted as certain, with regard to the Greeks and Romans, than that formerly there were people of that name; that they made a great noise in the world and did a great deal of mischief; that they wrote many books, which after lying in obscurity for a long period, were at length revived, continued in favor for several centuries, and again passed out of fashion. That such will be the state of the case a hundred years hence is not so very improbable as some may imagine—not more improbable, at any rate, than it was two centuries ago that the philosophy of Aristotle would be overthrown. Yet the peripatetic sage has now scarcely a disciple.

The various considerations that have now been submitted, seem calculated, on a just estimate, to abridge materially all rational confidence in the history of the pagan world; and I was induced to submit them under the persuasion that this sort of reading is much too highly thought of. Whether they be allowed to have any weight or not, is however quite immaterial to the main argument; for in whatever estimation such history be held, the whole of it, or nearly the whole, is spread before us in plain English—a form in which it may be more fully comprehended even by the illiterate than by the bulk of scholars in its ancient dress.

And now to conclude, I would ask the reader, what subject, what science, what branch of knowledge it is, on which we ought now to refer back to the ancients for instruction. In every thing but history, they are in fact already given up; and it would not be going to far to say that in history they are scarcely worth having. At all events, for this or any other purpose of information, the *original language* is not wanted.

CHAPTER VI.

Classical studies not the best means of strengthening the understanding—nor necessary to fill up the time usually devoted to education.

THE next argument on the classic list which I propose to examine is, that Greek and Latin afford a salutary exercise to the mind and induce useful habits of application. And what if it be so? Is there any thing peculiar in this? Who does

not see that as much may be said of each, and every study pursued in any of our schools, even the very lowest.

But to give the reader some idea of the common style (one might even say, the *approved* style) of prating on this topic, we may take a sample, and a pretty fair one, from the North Am. Rev. (vol. 13. p. 365 ;) which, however, is only a new version of sentiments often found in its earlier pages, and before that, in many others. The writer is speaking of the dead languages as a mental exercise, and he says—"We know of no means compared with this for the purpose of communicating the powers of quick and delicate discrimination, and of imparting clear perceptions of words and things." To take this part of the statement by itself, what does it amount to? As to *things*, one can hardly determine its import in this connexion; but at any rate, as the ancients were but superficial observers of *things*, and much given to useless speculations of every kind, we have on all subjects better sources of information than their writings afford. Then as to *clear perceptions of words, and delicate discrimination* in their use, whether of Greek or Latin, it has already been proved that this, when attained, can be of no service in English. The Reviewer goes on—"But in language, there are so many shades of meaning, differing from each other almost imperceptibly—the beauty of an expression so often depends on a peculiarity in the use of one word, or in the arrangement of several—the distinguishing spirit of an author, especially in a foreign tongue, is so difficult to be perfectly apprehended, and that double process of judgment, which consists in first ascertaining the meaning of a word in its original connexion, and then selecting the corresponding term in another language, is so constantly going on, that all the powers of observation, comparison, and in short whatever constitutes acquired taste, are constantly called forth and exercised."

Now on all this it may be remarked in the first place, that ere a student can begin the exercise here supposed, he must already have learnt as much of the languages as most pupils attain after 5 or 6 years close study in our best schools. He must in fact be already something of a critic. And when he has reached this point, on what are his powers of *observation, comparison, and taste*, to be exerted? Nothing more, as here admitted, than on words and expressions in a foreign language—on expressions wholly unlike our own—in a language too, which contains, as we have already shown, no information of any value not found in our own.

Granting then, by way of argument, that the study of foreign idioms has all the fitness here claimed as a stimulus to the intellect—granting this, I say, why not take some *living* language, and thus secure the means of enjoying a more copious and more instructive literature ; and at the same time a new medium of *oral* communication, which, in a multitude of cases, might essentially promote the interest as well as the gratification of its possessor ? As a study, it would be equally beneficial, and in the same way ; as a possession, incalculably more useful. But the fact is, as we shall presently see, there is no peculiar advantage of this kind, in the study of language—quite the contrary. The Reviewer indeed seems to think that nothing is so desirable as to be able to practise the art of *decyphering*—of extracting some definite ideas from obscure or ambiguous composition—a doctrine, which, if assented to would confer on *riddles* and *conundrums*, a dignity they have never yet assumed. But suppose him right in this notion, are we obliged to travel abroad in search of obscurity ?—have we not enough trying examples in our mother tongue ? The reviewer himself, on this hypothesis, may have other merit than that of good precept.

Without entering into the labyrinth of metaphysics, and analyzing the various faculties of the mind, or to speak more properly, its various modes of action, it is evident that exercise in any shape has a tendency to enlarge its powers. No study, no occupation, is without use in this respect—the only question relates to the degree. Nor is it worth while to inquire here which of the mental faculties (to retain the common phrase) stands most in need of cultivation. But since it is allowed that all should be stimulated in a certain proportion, and perhaps no very unequal one, a solid objection, founded on this admission, will lie against the learned tongues. The objection is, that such studies call into action the faculty of *memory* almost exclusively—leaving the mind in regard to its other powers, quite dormant.

I am sensible, however, that the current of opinion is against me. Unwearied pains are taken, and with abundant success, to spread abroad the belief that classic tuition is the best possible *discipline* for youthful minds—and nothing is more common than to hear the doctrine laid down in this very phraseology. Yet should any one ask what is meant by *discipline*, the explanation would seldom be intelligible ; or when it is, as in the case already cited, it furnishes no argument of any

force. The fact is, when language is made a juvenile study, the mind is practised almost exclusively in forming those trains of association which enable it to recall past ideas—that is to say in the process of memory—whereas it should be exercised at least as much in comparing, discriminating, deducing and judging; or in other words, in eliciting new ideas, as well as in reviving the old. The mental habits conducive to recollection are not therefore the best adapted to invigorate the understanding. Among the phenomena of thought, memory seems to perform but a subordinate office. It is a sort of purveyor to the mental powers generally—a day-labourer that brings the stones and the mortar with which more skilful workmen are to raise the edifice. But though a faculty not the most dignified, it is yet of excellent service, and singular activity. It is incessantly at work in every thing we study, and every thing we do; and from this very circumstance it gains naturally, and of itself, a vigour and promptness beyond the other intellectual powers. Why then should it receive any extraordinary cultivation? A faculty so constantly at task would seem to require no *special* culture at all.

That classical studies are of the nature here described, will scarcely be denied by any who have watched the progress of youthful education; and Bishop Hurd, already referred to at page 48, has pointed out the very same defects. If further authority were wanted in so plain a case, I might again allude to a ripe scholar in a neighbouring town, who has on several occasions assisted us in the preceding pages—one who not only is master of the various dialects taught in our highest seminaries, but who has likewise paid much attention to the *philosophy* of language, which, as far as I know, is taught in none of them. He admits explicitly that any man of a *tenacious memory* may become an interpreter of languages*—a truth corroborated also by every day's experience, since we find that in this sort of application, the brightest genius will often yield the palm to dulness. In short, a rapid proficiency in Greek or Latin is no indication of genius; perhaps the reverse. It is worth remarking too, that the kind of memory brought into play by this means is what Stewart calls a *casual memory*, and is ranked by him the lowest in point of merit. And further, not only does the memory rely on casual associations, but these again are of a very limited nature; so that if the intellect becomes wedded to habits so circumscribed, even memory it-

* North Am. Rev. vol. 9. page 181.

self is weakened in respect of other subjects—for it is a great mistake to suppose that practice in one way gives facility in all. In short, the whole current of thought in the remembrance of words, is quite opposite to that mode of associating ideas, (by resemblance and analogy) considered by all late metaphysical writers, as at once denoting and creating a vigorous mind.

The objection now under consideration, has been found to press so hard against the classical system, that many have endeavoured by a bold manœuvre to convert it into a recommendation. It is assumed that memory is really all we should attempt to cultivate—that nothing more can be done in youth than to amass a stock of materials, to be worked up by thought and reflection to some useful purpose in after years. Those renowned teachers, Barrow and Knox, argue in no small degree on this hypothesis; and a writer in the Portfolio, of no mean standing in scholarship, takes the ground openly. “Consider (says he) the period of life usually spent in this acquisition, which may be stated from 8 to 14 or 15; what but the memory can be employed during this age?” But a theory so exceedingly degrading to the human mind is fortunately altogether unsound. We all know that lads even from our common schools come out at the age of 14 or 15 not only with memories well furnished, but what is infinitely better, with capacities quickened and improved. Thus we see, that the very extravagances to which many resort for shelter in avoiding the objection in question, are a further proof of its validity.

But Dr. Rush well observes, “it is quite time to distinguish between a scholar and a philosopher.” Let us see then what has been said by men of philosophic minds against whipping on the memory to its utmost speed, while reason and invention are palsied by inaction. Speaking of the latent state of the reasoning faculty, Locke remarks as follows: “The greater number are those whom the ill habit of never exerting their thoughts, has disabled—the powers of their minds are starved by disuse, and have lost that reach and strength which nature fitted them to receive from exercise.” And again, “If their memories retain well, one may say they have the materials of knowledge, but like those for building, they are of no advantage, if there be no use made, but to let them lie heaped up together.”* Shephard, in his book on Education, observes,

* Locke on the Understanding, sec. 13.

“ It seldom happens, that men remarkable for the extent of their memory in the recollection of dates, and other minutiae, are distinguished for solidity of judgment.”* So too Duncan, in his essay on genius: “ How often do we see men load their memories with facts and circumstances, with dates and names, without inference or conclusion—and how often do we find learning consist in the servile repetition of the opinions of another without the consciousness of understanding in the person who adopts them.”† Quotations of this nature might be multiplied without end. Most writers of the higher order have raised their voice against the common practice of throwing into the mind the mere shadow of knowledge without the substance. Among them all Miss Edgeworth stands pre-eminent for cogency of reasoning against this seductive error. The chief aim of her excellent treatise on Education was to abolish all that parrot-like learning which formed the very essence of preceding systems (and yet bears no small sway in ours ;) and on the other hand, to give full scope to the inventive powers, and thus qualify the pupil to think and act for himself. The principles involved in the following quotation from Dr. Reid, have received from her admirable pen the most varied illustration—“ Of all the faculties of man (says he) that of invention bears the highest price. It resembles most the power of creation—we admire the man who shows a superiority in finding out the means of accomplishing an end.” Amid the universality of praise called forth by the ingenious disquisitions of the authoress alluded to, the North American Review comes in with its tribute,‡ not barely commending the prominent feature in her theory, but fortifying it by several new reflections equally just and pertinent. Now by all this and much more of like nature within our reach, it appears that the preference shown to *memory* as the leading object of early tuition, is wholly unsanctioned by writers of comprehensive minds and disinterested views.

The case then is this, that unless we are willing to permit the reason, the judgment, the invention, the taste, with various other faculties of a high order, to remain passive and undeveloped, while memory alone is improved, we shall be forced to conclude that Greek and Latin are nowise entitled to the supremacy they have so long enjoyed.

* Shephard and Joyce on Education, page 247.

† Duncan's Essay on Genius, page 67.

‡ Vol. 2. New Series, page 357.

But suppose if you please, that my reasoning on this point be not admissible in its full extent, or not at all; the objection would disappear, it is true, but no adverse claim would be established. Before the superior pretensions of the languages can be allowed, their claims must be stated and proved; not taken upon trust. But no writer within my knowledge has ever maintained even a plausible argument on the peculiar efficacy of classical studies; and my own observation leads to a very different conclusion. It is not proposed, however, to go through the endless ramifications of a negative argument. I wholly deny the alleged advantage of such studies, and call on their advocates to specify in what it consists, or at least, to inform us where an explanation may be found.

Before quitting the topic it is not amiss to remark, that I am aware of the complaint here urged against the languages being also applicable, though in far less degree, to other branches in themselves substantially useful. Geography, History, English Grammar, and several more, depend considerably on similar habits of mind. But the evil instead of being mitigated by this circumstance, is augmented, and our argument derives new force. If the memory is already overworked in studies of immediate utility, it should be relieved in such as are mere accomplishments; and the change should begin where the evil is most felt, and least compensated, which unquestionably is in the languages. Hence, by discarding these, and substituting other exercises, requiring more originality of thought, the minds of youth would receive a new energy, and their acquirements would be rendered more profitable.

If the considerations now presented have any force, it follows that the common school exercise of committing pieces to memory, and otherwise taxing that faculty so heavily, as it is certainly one of the most annoying tasks imposed on children, so is it one of the most useless—while at the same time none is more apt to beget an aversion to books, and thus lead the way to slothful and idle habits. Now in Greek and Latin this practice is carried to extremes; and when early years are devoted to the study, the evil is unavoidable; because the mind being then too feeble to cope with the innumerable difficulties of the case, little more can be done than to crowd the memory with something resembling knowledge in hope of its becoming really such at a future period. For the most part, however, the whole evaporates ere the conversion is effected; new objects take possession of the mind to the exclusion of former occupants; and thus it happens that a practice found-

ed on nothing but custom so often terminates in nothing but ignorance. A change of system, therefore, in whatever way, could hardly be for the worse. That most other pursuits are less objectionable in this view—some incomparably less—will not be disputed.

If the chief end of education be to unfold and invigorate the intellectual powers generally and simultaneously, no studies are better adapted to the purpose than Mathematics and Natural Philosophy; for without enumerating the various benefits resulting therefrom, it is enough to mention as one of the most obvious, and certainly not the least important, that by these means the mind becomes habituated to the best possible method of reasoning. Habits are acquired of observing, investigating, comparing, and judging, worth all that the ancients, or even moderns, have laid down as a separate art under the name of logic. It has been elegantly, though not accurately, said of History, that it is philosophy teaching by experience; and we may with far greater propriety say of Mathematics, that it is logic taught by example. “Would you have a man reason well (says Locke) you must use him to it betimes; you must exercise his mind in observing the connection of ideas and following them in a train. Nothing does this better than mathematics, which, therefore, I think should be taught all those who have time and opportunity—not so much to make them mathematicians as to make them reasonable creatures.” Doct. Barrow likewise remarks on this noble science as follows:—“It contributes more perhaps than any other intellectual acquisition to preserve the imagination in due subjection to the judgment. It is allowed to form or to teach the most valuable logic; and its definitions are the natural source of precision in our ideas.” (vol. 2. p. 287.)—This sort of study therefore, considered as a mental stimulus, is obviously superior to the languages; and so in some measure is almost every other.

One object of all instruction, both early and late, undoubtedly is to store the mind with useful knowledge; but a still greater object is to give it that general expansion and that quickness of apprehension, which while they qualify its possessor to grapple with the more complex and abstruse speculations of mature age, will fit him also for acting with promptness, judgment, and effect, in the busy scenes of life. Now classical studies, it is evident, furnish in no degree this sort of preparation

But to turn to another argument—it is pretended that the term of years ordinarily dedicated to a liberal course of education, cannot be well spent without including the languages. If by this it be meant that in the manner our schools are *now constituted* the period from eight to eighteen would not otherwise be fully occupied, I have no great hesitation in admitting the proposition. But what is this but saying in other words that our schemes of instruction are defective—a point I am as little inclined to controvert as any classical votary among us. It is indeed partly on this very defect in the reigning system that I ground my complaint of the languages, for unquestionably it is Greek and Latin which have brought things to this state by detruding other and more useful branches of knowledge. Was it really true that no different plan *could be devised* for affording constant and profitable exercise to the minds of youth, the argument would have some validity. But an idea so extravagant has never yet been distinctly avowed, much less established. It would have been nearly devoid of truth even at the period when classical learning was revived; and surely must be wholly so now when knowledge is not only wonderfully extended in degree, but greatly multiplied in kind. Without stopping to controvert so preposterous a notion, it is enough to allude, in complete refutation, to the seminary at Westpoint—where it has been evinced by actual experiment and to the satisfaction of every body, that the entire term of study before mentioned may be completed, and what is better, may be actively and profitably employed, without bestowing any portion on the learned tongues. We have also another instance, not greatly inferior, in Capt. Partridge's Institution at Norwich, where classical studies, though not actually excluded, are permitted to engross but a small share of attention. Whoever will take the trouble to inspect the ample schedule of useful and liberal arts and sciences taught at either of these places, will see at once how extremely frivolous is the pretence that suitable objects of study are yet wanting. With regard to Captain Partridge's school, the admission of Greek and Latin must be considered as subtracting considerably from its merit; and we may venture to predict that unless he conforms his scheme to that of Westpoint, he will strive in vain to impart that thorough and efficient education for which the latter is so justly celebrated.

However true then it may be that our plans are in general too limited and inadequate, no argument can thence be drawn in favour of the Languages:—we have only to amend the sys-

tem by judiciously enlarging the circle of studies—a change imperatively demanded by the existing circumstances of the world, and the actual state of human knowledge. The formation of a Public School in our own metropolis for higher attainments in various branches, exclusive of the languages, may be regarded as an auspicious commencement of such a change here; and an indication that more correct views are becoming prevalent. In any experiment of this nature, however, one great desideratum is that the superintendent should have full faith in its efficacy; or at any rate, should divest himself of all predilection for antiquated plans. No man who *really believed* with a writer in the *North Am. Rev.* (vol. 13, p. 365.) that “it is preposterous to call that education tolerably perfect, which is not founded on a thorough knowledge of the Latin at least, if not the Greek,” would be likely to give to such an establishment all the effect of which it might be susceptible. With impressions like that, he would embark in an experiment against his own judgment; and as men seldom engage cordially in what they do not approve, a scheme intrinsically good might altogether fail for want of interest on the part of the master. Fortunately however, the seminary in question was opened under the care of an instructor whose zeal in the cause was a sufficient pledge that academic tenets should have no influence; whose success under the improved system was such as to furnish the best evidence against his own theory; and who knows besides as well as most of us, probably much better, that the well turned compliments so often paid by scholars to what they call their *Alma Mater*, will seldom bear a rigid interpretation.

The excellent establishment now alluded to merits in every respect the most liberal patronage from the public; and I see no good reason why the course of tuition should not ere long be made as comprehensive and as perfect as that of West-point. Even on its present footing, the diversity and the importance of branches already taught, and well taught, are admirably calculated to imbue the minds of youth, not indeed with superficial or ornamental learning, but with substantial knowledge available in every station of life. And when the intrinsic excellence of an education, founded like this on the broad basis of utility, shall be justly appreciated, the public will be convinced that our cumbersome Latin system, which has reigned so long and been such a greedy devourer of our municipal resources, may be very advantageously lain aside. Independently, however, either of the high cost or the low

value of classical learning to students in general, a variety of reasons might be urged against upholding the languages at public expense. But it falls not within our present design to dwell on considerations relating to particular schools; being firmly persuaded that the whole system, however modified or however supported, should have been long ago permitted to pass away with the times and circumstances that gave it birth.

 CHAPTER VII.

Classical learning worth little as a resource ; and not much, as a facility to foreign living languages.

“THE chief advantage of a good education (says Aristotle) is to teach us how to employ our leisure.” A sentiment quoted and approved by Dr. Knox; yet like most other aphorisms from the same abundant fountain of dogmatism, it is wide of the truth. The object of education, justly described, rather is, to qualify us for performing with propriety the *active duties* of life, and to teach us in some measure what those duties are—though certainly the means of employing intervals of leisure, in a rational way, should not pass unheeded.

That an acquaintance with the learned tongues may be made the instrument of harmless pleasure is undeniable; but it is no less true that equal advantage attends every living language, as likewise numberless other pursuits, both literary and active. Whatever we contract a fancy for, may of course be made subservient to our gratification. Nor is there any danger now-a-days of men becoming converts to Cicero’s hypocritical and cynical doctrine that “*all pleasure is contrary to virtue.*”

The recommendation of Greek and Latin, on the score of amusement, is however but little dwelt upon; the reason for which may be found in the notoriety that ancient writers are, in point of fact, but seldom resorted to for such purposes. It is well known that not one in ten, perhaps not one in a hundred, who labour on the classics at school and college, have re-

course to them habitually in riper years for recreation. The major part, on receiving their diploma, close their books for life. It is, indeed, but fair to infer, from what occurs after the student's emancipation from college restraint, that in reality there is nothing alluring in the classic page ; which, on the contrary, still presents the repulsive aspect of a task, rather than the fascination of amusement. And here, by the way, we have another proof, if more were wanted, that little *information* can be drawn from that quarter ; for by the very constitution of our nature, the attainment of knowledge is almost invariably accompanied with pleasure. Every new idea we meet with in books, is a sort of discovery announced by others ; and discoveries are always gratifying.

But why talk about ancient literature as a resource, when the very men, who are loudest in its praise, read a hundred pages of English, for one of Greek or Latin. Nay, could we take a peep behind the curtain, and view even our professed scholars at their leisure moments, I suspect we should find, in three cases out of four, *Homer* and *Virgil* slumbering on the shelf, while *Scott* and *Irving* contend for preference at the reading table. We should find many who will just thumb a leaf or two in *Horace* before breakfast, and then sit down to a Scotch novel for the rest of the day. Let any one inquire (confidentially) among his learned friends, and all this will be verified. We may safely conclude then that the few who evince a steady attachment to ancient authors, if not more apparent than real, are exceptions to the general rule ; and must be characterized by something peculiar in their taste, their disposition, or their mental habits.

If then, the relish of classical dainties be so seldom durable, how can it be judicious to incur such great expense in the mere attempt, and perhaps an unsuccessful one, to provoke an appetite ? There would seem little wisdom in confining our children for eight or ten years of their lives, and at a cost, perhaps, of a couple of thousand dollars, to Greek and Latin, with a chance of ten to one that when they graduate, their books will be handed over to a new class of students, who in following a like course, are destined to exhibit the same symptoms of reluctant acquisition, and willing forgetfulness. Such, however, is the usual effect, and still the system continues—which can be accounted for perhaps, in no other way than by the factitious value attached to this routine of study—that is, by the mere eclat of a diploma.

But suppose, if you will, though the odds are against it, that a predilection for classical reading be really formed, the question arises, in what estimation it should be held. It is allowed on all hands, that those kinds of amusement deserve the preference, which, while they act as a pleasing and healthful exercise to the mind and body, contribute at the same time to intellectual improvement, or influence most favourably the moral character, or produce on the whole, in these or other ways, the most salutary effects. Consequently, the choice of employments to fill up the intermission of active duties, should be determined by the benefits they superadd. Now in apportioning a value to the dead languages on this principle, it would seem, if our view of them be correct, that in reality they but seldom effect the purpose of entertainment, and can never effect any thing more. In point of merit, therefore, they yield to divers other studies, conducive to further and more valuable ends. Of this nature, for example, are the various branches of natural philosophy and mathematics; which, according to Dr. Aikin, "take the lead of all mental pursuits in extent, variety, and dignity." Of this nature, likewise, is the important doctrine of ethics, together with most other liberal arts and sciences; but above all, that noblest of sciences, agriculture. In the same class too, we may rank the captivating study of natural history. Now each and every one of these pursuits, has a direct application to the purposes of life, which surely never can be said of the languages.

Furthermore, it is of the utmost consequence to consider well if the modes of recreation, for which we endeavour to inspire a taste, be capable of sustaining a *permanent interest*. The human mind is proverbially fickle; and its passions are so continually at work in soliciting indulgence, that there is always danger of the moral principle being overcome. Among youth especially, what is proper and laudable is too often a matter of only secondary inquiry; the first question will always be, is it interesting? And here, also, classical literature fails entirely. Generally speaking, (I appeal to observation,) the moment emulation ceases and the strife of academic rivalry is over, its relish is gone. How very different in this respect are the pursuits just referred to, which are alike edifying and engaging—they are the source, from their very commencement, of such genuine delight; they requite so abundantly the natural and eager curiosity of the human mind; they furnish at the same time so much information adapted to all situ

ations ; that when taste is once put in that train, it is not only ardent but durable ; never satiated by indulgence, but gaining new force as knowledge accumulates. Accordingly, it is a common remark, that no researches are followed with so much enthusiasm as those of natural philosophy and natural history ; and for this very reason, nothing can have a more friendly influence on the moral character, or present a stronger barrier against temptation.

Indeed, it is pretty certain that classical studies, generally speaking, offer no other allurements than the fame of scholarship. Few ever hope to reap any pleasure from them at any period ; and with those who do, the promised period seldom arrives—patience becomes exhausted in expectation—till at length the mind is willing to be employed in almost any way that can afford more immediate satisfaction. If this be not true, how happens it that students so joyously bid adieu to their Alma Mater, nor cast “one longing lingering look behind ?” Why else does a collegiate degree so generally operate like an act of divorce between a scholar and his books—and why is it the parties so seldom come together again in after life ? But I shall be accused, perhaps, of exaggeration or misrepresentation. Take then the opinions of those who speak from experience—take the following confession from what was designed to be an eulogium on classical studies :—“ Our acquisitions (says the writer) are as unsatisfactory as they are limited, and at the close of our college life we gladly escape from ancient literature as from a thorny labyrinth, in which we have been compelled to wander by the tyranny of custom ;”—(N. A. Rev. vol. 11, p. 421.) Here then we have the whole truth incautiously exposed by a professed apologist—and a simple reader would naturally expect that one who had himself been lacerated in the thorny labyrinth, would beseech his fellow mortals to shun the treacherous maze, or get out as soon as possible. But this is not the game—the advice is, that we should enter cheerfully, and remain in it all our lives. Such, however, are the inconsistencies their scheme involves ; and so far from being rare, they may be detected in almost every writer who attempts to justify a course of education, prevailing only in virtue of ancient title, without any adaptation to the present wants of mankind.

There is yet another respect in which classical studies lose incalculably compared with other recreative employments. There is nothing healthful or invigorating about them ; but directly the reverse. One reason, without doubt, is the ex-

treme difficulty of becoming so far master of the Greek and Roman tongues, and the respective styles of their authors, as to make that sort of reading agreeable—grateful to the mind and the feelings. Even among the most erudite scholars, the number is but small who would think of taking up a classic volume, as they do a drama, romance, or poem, in their native speech, merely for relaxation. “How many are there (says Professor Brown) who willingly join in expressing veneration for works, which they would think it a heavy burden to read from beginning to end.” Indeed, the sages of old wear a most forbidding countenance; their writings are, literally speaking, a *study*, and a very laborious one, all the way through. Hence, the most unremitting assiduity, and habits entirely sedentary, are indispensable to success; and these, we all know, have an evident tendency to impair the bodily health. As a proof, there have been not a few among the shining stars of scholarship, whose eager aspirations in this sterile path of learning had robbed their physical system of its natural and necessary repose—whose bloom of health had been chased away by poring over the occult refinements of Greek and Latin—who in short had persevered in trimming bright the midnight lamp of study till the lamp of life grew dim, or was wholly extinguished. This is no chimera, for we have witnessed the sad result in several melancholy examples. We have followed to the grave more than one ingenuous noble minded youth, immolated on the shrine of classic ambition.

It was before observed, when considering the languages as a source of knowledge, that we seem to forget the *age* we live in—a remark still more pertinent in the point of view now presented. Surely, those who would send us to the ancients for amusement, must intentionally shut their eyes to the infinitely greater resources of modern literature—so vast, so varied, so admirably adapted to please as well as instruct:—What length of life, what intensity of reading, could ever exhaust the hundredth part of the excellent books in our own language—to say nothing of catalogues almost equally rich in every European tongue. Then with regard to the comparative *merits* of ancient and modern works, far abler pens than mine would fail in doing justice to the numberless traits of superiority which mark the productions of latter times. I might fill almost a volume with opinions to this effect, now lying before me—not, however, the opinions of men muffled up in Greek and Latin, who, generally speaking, are but poor

judges in such a case ; but of men whose attainments extended far beyond the narrow boundaries of scholarship, and spread over a wide a field of science and learning. But why even hint at such a comparison, when no man would be so egregious a pedant as to place the ancients for a moment in competition. Literature among the moderns is a splendid edifice, in which every species of beauty, elegance, and utility, conspire to delight the eye and satisfy the understanding ; ancient literature is a rude cavern, where, though here and there a diamond sparkles, its general aspect is dark, rugged, and unsightly.

But enough on this subject ; for after all, whatever scholars may say about the captivating graces of Greek and Roman composition, their *practice*, we find, tells another story, and their casual admissions confirm it.

Let us turn now to another topic meriting some attention. Among the various arguments which the admirers of antiquity carry in their budget, and deal out on all occasions, one is, that Latin affords a mighty help in acquiring living languages. The advantage of some acquaintance with living modes of speech being universally acknowledged, new means have been drawn from this circumstance to strengthen the classic cause. We are told again and again, that Latin is worth learning were it for nothing else—that it is the best possible *foundation* (as the phrase goes) for French, Spanish, &c.—that when the former is once mastered, the latter are a mere pastime, and so on. But while it is conceded that ancient tongues may facilitate a *superficial* knowledge of the modern, I maintain that even this is real only in part. The apparent facility in such cases is principally the effect of contrast, for almost any thing would seem a relief after Greek and Latin.

At all events, the classical proficient will lose in accuracy at least as much as he gains in despatch. We may remark in the first place, that though the grammar of French, Spanish, and Italian, have a visible analogy to the Latin, yet is it doubtful if this very analogy, since there is no precise accordance, does not more naturally induce confusion than discrimination, and thus stand directly in the way of accurate knowledge. However this may be, it is certain that the rules of syntax (by far the most important part of grammar) are in every language peculiar, and quite unsusceptible of control or even modification from any other. In this respect the most thorough knowledge of Latin will go for nothing. With regard,

secondly, to the signification of words, in any modern tongue, the utmost that Latin can do (for reasons already assigned) would be merely to suggest hints, which though frequently approximating the true sense, would seldom or never exactly coincide ; and thus in effect would often lead a student wrong, for once it put him right. The light shed on his path by this means, being wholly deceptive, is something worse, perhaps, than total darkness. Thus the matter stands on the score of facility. On the score of economy, whether as to labour or expense, it stands no better—for the truth is, that this *foundation* as it is called, (laid as one might say in *Roman cement*) would cost more, vastly more, than the whole superstructure of modern languages, when raised on their own natural and appropriate bases. It cannot be denied, that one half the time now spent on the learned tongues at school and college, which on the average may be taken at six or eight years, would be sufficient for attaining a good degree of familiarity with all the principal dialects now spoken abroad—a truth that will not be called in question by men experienced in these matters.

There is, besides, another evil in the case of some moment. A student fresh from Latin has many things to *unlearn*—he must completely shake off the habit of pondering on classic rules and classic analogies ; for until this be effected, he might toil ever so hard on French, or Spanish, to very little purpose. The plain inference from all these considerations is, that to go through the usual course of classical studies, in hope of smoothing the difficulties in modern tongues is the most injudicious procedure imaginable.

These observations, I am aware, will seem almost superfluous to those who have given any attention to the philosophy of language, and are free from scholastic prepossessions. The fact is, the reputed usefulness of Latin in this way, is bottomed wholly on the two following notions—that grammar is much the same in all languages ; and that the standard of meaning, in words derived from Latin, must be sought in the parent tongue—fallacies already sufficiently exposed. It surely is quite time to purge our theories of all such academic whims. If there be any one incontrovertible proposition within the whole compass of philology, it is this, that neither the proper collocation of terms, nor their genuine signification, in any language whatever, can be in the smallest degree affected by imaginary or even real analogies drawn from any other. All modes of speech have no doubt, certain points of

resemblance, and to seek out the less obvious is, I admit, a very curious, and sometimes an amusing occupation ; but it goes no farther ; and whoever resorts to such means for perfecting his knowledge of any particular dialect, not only will lose his labour, but in all probability be led astray.

CHAPTER VIII.

The dead languages considered in reference to professional men.

IN considering the subject with reference to professional men, a distinction may be drawn between the dead languages, and classical learning. The latter term comprehends a great deal the most, and all that it includes more than the former, of which some particulars will presently be noticed, has never been pretended to be of any service to either of the professions.

As to the languages, they can be valuable no otherwise than as a means of acquiring professional information. How far a lawyer, a physician, or a divine, may turn them to account, can perhaps be accurately estimated by those only who are engaged in these vocations respectively. Others, however, may draw some conclusions from general principles and general facts. That Greek and Latin are peculiarly beneficial to this class of men, is a persuasion of quite ancient date : coeval at least with the revival of classical literature ; perhaps long antecedent :—And in point of fact, a comprehensive view either of law or medicine was hardly to be attained in former times without the aid of Latin ; for until within the last half century, this was the vehicle of public medical instruction, in most, if not all, the colleges of Europe ; and in this language also, were recorded the proceedings of English courts of law and of parliament, down to the time of George the second. On our side the Atlantic, circumstances were not indeed exactly the same ; but yet the habit of adopting English opinions and practices, gave rise to a similar routine of education here—add to which, the custom that long prevailed among writers in these departments, of putting their treatises and disquisitions in a Latin dress, and the introduction of such writings among us, concurred to render an ac-

quaintance with that tongue at least very convenient. How the Greek language came at first to be tacked on as an appendage either to law or medicine is not easy to determine, nor worth while to inquire—it is enough to know that no value is now ascribed to it in this view by any one.

With regard to divinity the case is not very different. The preceding causes, in part, joined to several others that might be mentioned, were instrumental in bringing into repute the Roman tongue as a preparatory study. On the other hand, Greek derived its consequence from being the supposed original language of the new testament—and no doubt, if any importance be assigned to that branch of theology called biblical criticism, Greek must take a high rank. The necessity of such criticism, however, either to a just conception of the christian scheme, to a lucid exposition of its precepts, or a practical performance of its duties, has never yet been shown, and I am persuaded never can be. So convinced of this was that classic veteran Doctor Knox that he wrote his “Christian Philosophy” expressly to discourage speculation on dubious points, whether critical or doctrinal, as being alike unfriendly to genuine christian piety; and in this respect, at least, he manifests a deeper insight into human nature than those who indulge in almost a licentious inquisitiveness about passages of scripture that can never be settled, and mysteries that cannot be explained. In his essays likewise, the Doctor holds the same language—“Neither polemical, controversial, doctrinal, nor systematical divinity, (says he), seem calculated to answer the important ends of true religion. These ends are all friendly and benign; but I believe that peace, benevolence, and purity of heart, are not at all promoted in those many volumes of theology that owed their origin to controversy, and to logical and metaphysical refinement; these originate in pride and terminate in acrimony.” And in another place he announces his settled opinion that “speculative and polemical divinity commonly diffuse scepticism without contributing any thing to moral reformation.”* Now here is a writer, eminent both as a divine and a scholar,—a professed advocate of the languages too—who assigns to them no value as an instrument of biblical criticism; for this seems a necessary inference from the quotations given. If we turn next to Doct. Gregory, who stands precisely the same in all respects,

* Knox's Essays, 42 & 168.

what are his sentiments? We read in his very Essay in favour of classical learning as follows—"Without wishing to appear a lover of paradox, I cannot dissemble that I do not in my own mind allow force to the maxim which insists on the absolute necessity of classical learning in what are called the professions. I confess I think it a most *pernicious pedantry*, that would involve in any kind of mystery those sciences which are most essential to human happiness. What, shall none but Greek and Latin scholars be permitted to employ their reason on the most necessary topics? Admitting that there ought to be men in the Christian church who should be able to read the scriptures in the original languages, must every plain country clergyman be an adept in languages which cannot afford him the least assistance in instructing the people committed to his care?" He says likewise of such learning as regards *medical men*—"In medicine I am sure it has rather impeded than advanced science." Here then is an author who recommends the languages as a *general study*, yet makes them out to be worth nothing to the professions.

But further, relative to the clergy, I should be glad to know what important new lights they may yet hope to derive from ancient tongues with reference to the religion we all profess; and the duties of which it is the appropriate as well as the avowed business of their lives to practise and enforce. The received translation of the Bible exhibits every *practical* precept of Christianity in so intelligible a shape that none can misunderstand; and if we conform our lives and conduct to those precepts, it can be of little consequence what opinions are embraced on disputed points of faith. It is only on speculative points that a diversity of sentiment prevails, and these being all more or less mysterious to the human mind, and doubtless designed to be, it would impeach the wisdom as well as benevolence of the Deity to suppose that any error of belief in such matters could affect our future welfare.

It is not, however, barely in one translation of the scriptures that the scheme of our religion is displayed; but in several; all the productions of as great scholars as the world has ever yet seen, and greater I suspect than will again appear. These versions, it is true, vary somewhat in phraseology; and it could not be otherwise, since no two men without previous concert, would clothe the same idea in exactly the same words—nor if they did, would it be construed alike by different readers. Yet so slight are the disagreements actually found, that a learned professor of the orthodox sect affirms

the very worst translation of the Bible to contain every thing *essential* to our religion—an opinion in which another learned writer, of a very different sect, is entirely disposed to coincide. (see North Am. Rev. No. 34, p. 53.) What then is the conclusion? why surely this, that whatever the dead languages may yet have in store for us, there is at any rate nothing *essential* to Christianity. This moreover is the dictate of common sense. In a religion designed, and so admirably calculated as this is for mankind at large, the controlling principles cannot lie deep; and to say that any thing like learning is necessary to discover them, is to make it a religion for the learned only, without any binding force on others.

But is it not extraordinary that men who so emphatically acknowledge the *sufficiency* of our common version, should nevertheless inculcate the necessity of becoming proficient, not only in Greek and Latin, but in Hebrew, Arabic, and an endless list of cognate dialects? This cannot fail to appear, to every layman at least, a glaring inconsistency; and yet we find not so much as an attempt at explanation. How is it to be accounted for? Is time of so little value to a student in divinity that he can afford to spend some years in preparing himself to investigate points that are *unessential*—points too, which, if by chance determined to his own satisfaction, might still be viewed very differently, or at all events remain doubtful, with other investigators of equal talents and learning? On the other hand, if the object be to qualify students for carrying on the warfare of sectarian controversy (which it may be feared is too often the case) so far from compensating for time already lost, it would only induce them to lose a great deal more.

Nor is it altogether a crude surmise of Knox's that what is called biblical criticism has been actually *prejudicial* to the cause of revealed religion—for not only has it detected, but as the North Am. Rev. informs us, has carefully enumerated, more than a hundred thousand various readings in the few manuscripts extant of the New Testament alone—and it is not quite an idle fear, that materials are now preparing by help of this same inquisitive criticising spirit, which in the hands of some sagacious and persevering infidel writer, may hereafter be converted into instruments of attack more alarming than any the world has yet had occasion to deplore.

A clergyman's field of study as well as of duty, is surely extensive enough without diving into researches so intermina-

ble and so unsatisfactory—it is also a much nobler field, and one in which he may render tenfold the service to his fellow men, as regards either their present or their future welfare. “How much more important and useful to mankind (says the eloquent Bennet) are the labours of that pastor, who, by one judicious, impassioned, and well directed discourse, appals the sinner, encourages the saint, guides the perplexed, revives the drooping, or condescends to cheer the bed of sickness with divine consolations.”

Then again, as to medical knowledge, if the languages are indispensable, or even to any considerable degree beneficial, how is it that out of thirty books established by our medical college for the examination of students, *not one* is in Latin or Greek, nor by a Greek or Roman author? How is it that among seventy others particularly recommended to be read, only *one* is in Latin, though there are *several in French*? And why then is it that *French* is not made a branch of preparatory study in this profession? As respects law, on the other hand, if Latin be so very useful, how does it happen that questions, depending on a critical knowledge of that language, arise in our courts scarcely once an age? Or lastly, in the way of query, how is it that the languages are very generally neglected in *all* the professions—so much so as to seem not worth even the trouble of *retaining*?—Yet on looking around us, we find this to be the case. Scholarship appears to die away as professional studies advance. Now if the reader is able to reconcile all this with the assumed importance of the languages in a professional point of view, I am ready to do homage to his superior sagacity. The task is quite an over-match for me.

In a word, whatever explanation be given of the alliance of classical learning with professional knowledge, it may be clearly perceived to have grown out of circumstances not now existing, and to have been perpetuated by habits, and modes of thinking, founded at least as much on authority and precedent as on reason. It is very true, there are a variety of Latin names and phrases yet current in law and medicine; but they are nothing more than terms of art, and can be learnt quite as well from English books as from Latin—probably even better, because such terms are applied not in conformity to the usual practice of the language, but in a sense altogether technical.

On the whole, then, there would really appear to be some ground of scepticism, whether the advantages of classical

learning, even in the professions, are anywise commensurate with the time and labour necessarily consumed. For my own part, I am wholly unwilling to concede that the enlightened men who fill these departments in our time, have yet to seek the principles of their science in the crude conjectures of heathen philosophers. It is extremely difficult to believe that the best talents of modern Europe have for many generations been assiduously devoted to these sciences, and yet no progress been made. But if such be really the case—if the world is yet in a state of Egyptian darkness on these matters; or what is little better, in Grecian or Roman twilight—if this be the fact, certainly it is quite time we should know it; for nothing is more hazardous than misplaced confidence.

Let us admit then, (but only by way of argument) that Greek and Latin have some valid pretensions in this respect—let us fall in with the prevailing opinion that they are useful to professional men though not to others—and I am led to believe that the prevailing opinion is in fact already thus limited; because, after all, the chief reason usually given by parents for putting their children on the languages, is, that they may be prepared for engaging in professional studies should they subsequently incline. Here then we take a position which most readers, probably, would think a fair one, even though our previous reasoning were altogether set aside; yet from these very premises a conclusion may be satisfactorily deduced, if I am not mistaken, that the *system* now followed is inexpedient and unphilosophical; and this I proceed to show:—

One monstrous incongruity in the system, on this hypothesis, is visible at the first glance; for why should we include in a *general* scheme of instruction what is available only in certain occupations? Why confine a dozen boys for almost a dozen years of their lives to Greek and Latin, in order that two or three may become lawyers, physicians, or divines? It is much the same as to till and plant a field of twelve acres, with the design of reaping but two or three. Yet such is our practice; and it is of so long standing, that its absurdity is overlooked—thus exemplifying accurately a remark of Kames, that “custom and familiarity hide the defects of established plans.” If the principle on which we have so long proceeded were presented to us in a new shape, its fallacy would be too obvious to escape detection. If for instance, any one should recommend that our children be employed from the age of eight to fourteen in acquiring the rudiments of each and every

branch of business, mechanical, agricultural, mercantile, and professional, on the ground that their vocation being as yet uncertain, they should be prepared for every thing, the folly of the scheme would be apparent. Every body would see that nine-tenths of what is thus learnt would be nearly useless.

The application of these remarks is perhaps already anticipated, which alone would be some evidence of their rationality. If the dead languages have only a special and not a general utility, common sense requires that they be taken out of the ordinary routine of education, and made a branch of *professional* studies—not to be undertaken till the profession be determined. On the other hand, the general system of early instruction, in which all are to participate, should include those parts of knowledge only (numerous enough and extensive enough most certainly) of use in every walk of life, and best adapted to invigorate and expand the mental faculties. Such is the course plainly marked out by reason ; and by this mode of proceeding a saving would evidently be made, at the very outset, of an enormous aggregate of time and labour now wasted by those to whom Greek and Latin are superfluous.

But this is by no means the only advantage that might accrue. The very students who have professional objects in view, would themselves be essentially benefitted ; their field of study would be narrowed to less than one half. The value of learning, like every thing else, can only be measured by the test of *utility* ; which, considered with reference to particular occupations, (as assumed by our hypothesis,) becomes *professional utility*. Hence, in law or medicine, the Greek language may be dispensed with ; and in divinity, there is no good reason for retaining the Latin, as that was not the original language of any part of the Scriptures. But here perhaps, we shall be stopped by the pretence that Latin is necessary to understand the Greek. If so, we might call in aid the opinion of a writer, a leader in the classic host, who has argued at some length directly to the contrary—that Greek is a prerequisite to Latin, and ought to be studied first.—(See N. A. Rev. vol. 11th. p. 209.) Both doctrines however are alike scholastic and unphilosophical—no one language is dependent on another. Thus it would seem that in preparing for either profession one or the other language may as well as not be omitted ; and by this circumstance alone the student's labour

would be abridged one half. Is not this a saving of some importance ?

Furthermore, keeping utility always in mind, the whole time now spent in attempting to discover and relish the beauties, the elegances, and the harmony of language, might likewise be saved : for whatever value scholars may attach to these things, they are in a great measure imaginary—at all events, entirely useless to the professions. Edgeworth very pertinently asks, “ If lawyers could make Latin and Greek verses with all the facility of our most renowned scholars, of what use would it be to them on the bench ?”—and we might ask the same of physicians or clergymen. So also Schlegel remarks in the same spirit, “ The matter of chief importance in all civilization and all literature, is not the dead treasures we possess, but the *living uses* to which we can apply them.” With the “ puerilities of obsolete mythology,” (as Johnson thought them) or the still greater puerilities of obsolete versification, as visionary too as it is obsolete ; neither a physician, a lawyer, nor a divine, can have any thing to do. It is a species of *elegant trifling*, (as Gregory calls it) condemned even by many classical men, as unworthy the attention of scholars—much less should it be permitted to engross the time of those whose duties require a broad scope of knowledge, distinct from scholarship, and quite above it. Here then, we discard another ponderous load of difficulties by which every learner is embarrassed. Now when all this is fairly taken into consideration, it will be clearly perceived that a vast amount of unprofitable labour may be saved to the professional student, yet nothing of consequence be neglected.

The good effects, however, of the change proposed, I conceive do not stop here. The very circumstance of entering on the languages at a maturer age, instead of being as some might think, an objection, is in reality a recommendation. A young man of sixteen or seventeen, having decided on a profession, and being fully sensible of the importance of his studies to his future success in life, would engage in them with ardour—he would master every thing as he goes along ; and thus his acquisitions, while they are facilitated, would also be more substantial. Whatever teachers may say, the dead languages are of all studies the least adapted to *youthful* minds. They are proverbially dry and irksome ; the reason of which is that children are unable to perceive either meaning or use in them. This branch of learning seems therefore to require in a special manner the incitement of some interesting object

in prospect, on which it has a bearing ; and this therefore is the very branch that should be postponed until such a stimulus can be felt.

There is moreover another improvement of which the case appears susceptible in a professional point of view. Why may not a student, at the same time that he is learning the language, accumulate information applicable to his destined occupation ? The ancient classics, it is true, will supply nothing of the kind. But suppose professional books were taken as text books ; would not something more be learnt than the mere language ? May not rules, facts, and reasonings of a professional nature be stored up in the memory just as well as scraps, passages, and even whole books from ancient poets and orators ? How much may be done in this way, it is not for me to decide ; but in branches of knowledge depending so materially on facts and precepts, it is natural to suppose a great deal may be done. Nor will any one pretend that Latin cannot be as well learnt in treatises on law and medicine as in Cicero or Virgil. We may be told indeed, that the language of such books is not the same either in style or diction—that it is not classical. I answer, so much the better—it is the very style, and the very diction a professional man would stand in need of—a style too, which even now he is obliged sooner or later to become familiar with, if by chance he has acquired the true classical taste in the first instance. I again repeat, that with students of this description scholarship is not the aim ; and least of all, that sort of *ornamental scholarship*, which deals only in matters of style and taste. For these reasons Latin books of modern date would seem in every way preferable to the classics. It is scarcely necessary to remark that the same reasons will apply to the Greek in the study of divinity.

There is certainly nothing visionary in the persuasion that some such plan as this would be a decided improvement in professional education, since it is founded on a just distinction between that sort of acquaintance with the languages, which is really useful in the professions, and the more discursive though less accurate knowledge of them comprised in what is termed scholarship. Some people, to be sure, would have the world believe that no one, without a diploma in his pocket, should be listened to on these subjects ; but the reader will bear in mind that most of the considerations here submitted move on general principles, independent either of classical or professional experience ; and he will take the liberty there-

fore to judge for himself, whether they are sound or futile. For myself, I am firmly convinced that a student at the age of sixteen or seventeen, after two years application to the languages in the way proposed, would reap advantages seldom realized by ten years toil in the usual way; and would be incomparably better fitted for following up his studies in the office either of a lawyer, a physician, or a divine.

I have now stated the grounds of my belief, that even if the languages are absolutely necessary to professional men, yet the existing routine of study is not the best, and that a better may be devised. Innovations, to be sure, are always liable to objections—they often wound the consciences of some, and generally touch the pockets of others; but improvement is seldom to be attained at a cheaper rate; and he must be little conversant with the history of knowledge who has yet to learn, that a reverence for antiquity and established usage has perpetuated a thousand errors where innovation has created one.

CHAPTER IX.

Some account of ancient Prosody, so called; or the received theory of Greek and Latin versification—its follies, deficiencies, and incongruities.

THE end proposed, in devoting a few pages to this subject, is not to show what ancient poetry *was*, for of this no idea can be formed, as the reader presently will be quite satisfied—nor is it to explain the nature of that unspeakable harmony which scholars pretend they find, perhaps think they find, in ancient verse; for that would be explaining a nonentity. The object is to let parents see how foolishly and unprofitably their children are employed, for no inconsiderable portion of their time at Latin schools, in learning what moderns have chosen to consider the true theory of ancient versification.

“What voice has been so celebrated (says a Frenchwriter) as that of the syren; what song so much extolled as that of the swan;” yet it was well known, he goes on to remark, even in times of comparative ignorance, that swans did not

sing; and Pliny himself denounced it as a vulgar prejudice—"But the swan (he continues) is a fine bird—its plumage a delightful emblem of purity and innocence; and there are errors so pleasing and so seductive that we willingly overlook the deception." Just so it is, in my opinion, with those noted songsters Homer and Virgil; and the time, I believe, will come, in season possibly to be witnessed by some of us, when the enchanting music of their verse will be *acknowledged* a mere illusion, and the present age be laughed at for its credulity. Indeed there appear to have been at all times not a few among the higher order of scholars, who have been conscious of some deception in this particular. This class, however, have always supported a double creed, an esoteric and an exoteric—one for the initiated, the other for the vulgar. In their conversation, and their writings designed for general readers, they have held up the idea that nothing is so captivating, or so inspiring, as the melody of ancient verse; while in disquisitions addressed to scholars themselves, controversy after controversy has been carried on, not exactly whether ancient poetry be or be not harmonious (for classic orthodoxy would reject the statement in this form); but what comes to the same thing, whether its harmony may be recognized by modern ears, and of what elements it is or was composed.

It should here be remarked, that the word *poetry*, and its analagous term *poem*, having been plunged deep into the abyss of etymology, endless disputes have arisen on their meaning, and as usual, without coming to any decision. With this however we have fortunately no concern. I take it for granted that the pleasing effect called harmony or melody, whether of verse or prose, results in every language, from the true vernacular pronunciation of words, selected and arranged in a certain order and with a view to produce that effect—that when thus arranged and thus pronounced, they do produce it—that when either the arrangement is in any considerable degree different, or when the pronunciation is so, no pleasing effect can follow—no harmony can be perceived. This is undeniably the case in English, and we have every reason to think from the very nature of things that it holds true in every other language, ancient or modern—for is it not repugnant to reason to suppose that Homer and Virgil arranged their verse on the basis of their vernacular pronunciation, and yet that harmony will result from it, *however pronounced—however read?* What then would be the use of arrangement? Can you imagine a piece of music that may be played *any*

how, and yet be melodious? Every intelligent reader must therefore perceive that when Greek and Latin ceased to be living languages, and their true pronunciation became lost, as it now *confessedly* is, every thing like harmony must have expired at the same time—leaving its very nature to be supplied by hypothesis, and its effect by imagination.

Nevertheless harmony is one of those ideal excellences in ancient tongues, on which classic enthusiasts have taken particular delight in dwelling; and thus a belief has obtained among the unlearned that it has a real existence. It is therefore desirable to have it understood, if possible, what ancient poetry really is, or at least what it is represented to be; and in attempting an explanation, I shall endeavour as far as practicable to be perspicuous, even at the risk of some prolixity. Yet such is the chaos of absurdity in which the subject is immersed, there is little chance of complete success.

Among the variety of topics about which critics and philologists in all ages have busied themselves, few have engaged more attention, and none proved more refractory, than that of versification, and the sources of its harmony. Not indeed that the nature and elements of metrical composition, as regards any particular language, are really inscrutable to those who are familiar with its genuine pronunciation; for it is unquestionably true, in respect of our own, that in spite of all the contradiction, ambiguity, and even positive nonsense, that has been written on the subject by Dr. Foster, with many others before and since, its pleasing effect is at least in a sufficient degree accounted for.* This however is comparatively a recent thing. Had the matter originally been investigated without reference to ancient theories, the true sources of English metre would have been more generally and much sooner understood. The effect of classic authority has always been to perplex every question on which it was brought to bear; and our writers having unfortunately set out on this inquiry, as on numberless others, with the erroneous impression that ancient speculations would abridge their labour, they have enveloped in a cloud of scholarship what might easily have been resolved by appealing to their own senses. Borrowing, as they did, from Latin prosody, a long catalogue of rules and phrases, they have talked incessantly, though

* To show how completely Foster's mind was dimmed by his learning, it is enough to mention that he holds *English* verse to have its essence in *length* of syllables.

never consistently, about acute and grave accents, about long and short syllables, about dactyles, spondees, iambics, &c.—when in truth *English* verse is an utter stranger to them all, and owes its melody chiefly, if not solely, to a *stated recurrence of syllabic emphasis*. The matter is now pretty well settled, through the aid of Sheridan and others, who rejected ancient doctrines; and it might have been settled centuries ago, had not scholarship unluckily interfered.

With respect however to Greek and Latin poetry, the case is by no means the same. This inquiry has always been, among moderns, a different one in its very nature, depending on different means of solution; and it has been attended with far less success, or rather with no success at all. As the ear cannot assist in judging of what is called metre, or rhythmus in a dead language, there is no appeal but to original authors in that language, or to arguments founded on general principles; and as to Greek and Latin, the case seems at all times to have been nearly hopeless. If indeed, there had been philosophy enough in Rome or Athens to deduce from the subtle elements of speech, the true principles of their metrical compositions; or even had their writers refrained from attempting to explain what in reality they did not comprehend; we should in either case have been in a fitter state to form a judgment of their versification—we should have understood it better, and esteemed it less.

But as it happens, the works that have come down to us are so wofully ambiguous and discordant on this head, that the elements, or as Walker calls them, the efficient of Greek and Latin versification, have never been known to moderns. In the absence therefore of all accurate knowledge, recourse has been had to *hypothesis*; and a theory has been formed and taught, for I know not how many centuries, as embracing the true principles of classic poetry. Yet it is well known that hundreds of scholars, of deserved celebrity for talents and learning, have dissented from this theory, and denounced it as spurious—from which circumstance, and from its own inherent absurdities, it would doubtless have been long since exploded, but for its intimate connexion with the whole classic system. And this is the more probable since the theory goes no further, even in pretension, than to explain what classic poetry *was*, without accounting in the smallest degree for the harmony which *moderns* are said to realize in that sort of reading.

The scheme of ancient prosody now current in our schools is built on the hypothesis just alluded to ; and ancient metre, according to this scheme, is resolved entirely into *length of syllables*, or what is technically called *quantity*. It consists, it is said, of a certain arrangement, in some degree uniform, of long and short syllables—one of the former being equal to two of the latter, that is to say, requiring double the time in its pronunciation. Not that this comparative time is ever regarded, or could be, by moderns, but is *supposed* to have been by the ancients. These two species of syllables variously combined, taken two, three, or four together, form what the ancients called feet—each combination being furnished with a specific name, such as dactyle, spondee, and so on, to the number of about 30, as Lord Kames says, or perhaps even 124, as Dr. Rees says.* These feet again, mixed and arranged in certain ways, constituted the various kinds of verse used, or at least named, by the ancients, such as Hexameter, Anapestic, Saphic, and a multitude of others.

To make out so splendid a variety of verse, with syllables appropriately arranged to accord with the given characteristics of each distinct species of metre, might seem an impossibility ; but the means of *accommodation* were correspondent, and though arbitrary at first, were at length allowed, it is said, by custom. Numberless syllables, for instance were laid down as *common*, to be used either for long or short, as occasion required. Many others, short by nature, that is to say, in prose, were *accounted* (as Latin grammarians say) long in verse. Besides this, there were other arbitrary changes, (called by moderns *figures in scanning*,) that words underwent to suit the purposes of verse ; by aid of which, sometimes a syllable is cut off, or considered as null—at other times, one syllable is expanded into two, or two contracted to one ; long are made short, and short are made long. In addition to these means, there are what is called *figures of diction*, by help of which a line may be enlarged or curtailed, either in fact or by supposition. And lastly, when all this will not suffice to resolve the verse and *give it a name*, Latin grammars permit us in some cases to cut the line in two, and divide its feet differently—which by the way is stated to be sometimes a positive improvement.

Now with every thing so loose and arbitrary as this (and this is precisely what our grammars teach) those tasteful peo-

* See the end of the Chapter for references and quotations.

ple, the Greeks and Romans, could never have been in want of verse, for they might make it out of any passage from Aristotle or Cicero. And moderns very likely may do the same, provided a conformity to prosodial rules be the only test. Walker indeed quotes a learned critic, who says, that with such unbounded latitude, he can reduce to verse of the true ancient measure, any passage from Robinson Crusoe, and he actually gives a specimen. We find it stated likewise, in several grammars, (Buttman's Greek for instance) besides many other authorities, that the division of a verse into feet is in *a great measure arbitrary*; and it would be, I believe, no more than the truth to say *wholly arbitrary*. But now for one moment, if Homer's lines (to take a case) may in *a great measure* be divided into five feet, or into seven feet, what then becomes of Hexameter verse, which by rule ought to have six feet?—How indeed can Hexameter be distinguished from any other?—We may divide *prose* as we please, but who ever heard that *verse*, properly so called, can be treated in this way? Is not this *almost* an admission that ancient verse is such only in name?—But to return to the scheme.

With resources so unlimited as before mentioned, of *accommodating* syllables to their destined station in verse, one would hardly have thought it necessary to lay down rules for determining what are to be *called* long, or what are to be called short, since all this seems to be merged in a more general rule, which is to place them as you please, and *call* it verse. Latin grammarians nevertheless have furnished precepts in this way to the number of about twenty; though by no means providing for all the syllables of the language, (a writer in Rees says *not one half*) all the rest being left to be ascertained from the use of the poets—a method sufficiently operose, one would think, considering the many thousands thus remaining *incog*. To supply this unaccountable and gloomy deficiency, the writer in Rees, just mentioned, takes great credit for having deduced, after four consecutive analyses of the language (no trifling affair) 157 *additional* rules, embracing as he says every thing before undetermined—so that hereafter if there be any lack of skill in this favourite branch of ornamental scholarship, it cannot be for lack of precept. The reader, if he wishes, may see the labours of this new investigator spread over the last twenty pages, under the head of Quantity in Rees' Ency. The task he offers, is to be sure, rather repulsive; but yet, unquestionably easier than to learn the syllabic length of half the language merely by practice;

and most certainly, by one means or another, the whole must be learnt ere a student can distinguish verse from prose, unless it be by its arrangement in lines.

Against a theory thus fanciful, several objections occur, arising from general principles. The very assumption on which it is built, that syllables were only of two kinds, or reducible to two, is so entirely unphilosophical as to shake the faith of almost every writer who has tried his patience on this intractable subject—perhaps I might say *every one*. All have admitted, even the ancients themselves, that some exercise of imagination was necessary to meet the case. It is well known that in living languages syllables are *various*, and so nice their gradation, that any classification, depending on length of sound, would be visionary. Then again, the language of every people having been formed long ere critics or poets existed, and by illiterate men, it is little short of absurdity to believe that syllables, as naturally and usually pronounced, could with any more propriety be divided into two kinds than into three, four or five. And besides, how did it happen that *Latin*, the language of a nation populous and powerful, long before the conquest of Greece (and there is no reason to suppose its chief elements were ever changed) possessed naturally, in length of syllables, so accurate a conformity to Greek as this theory supposes, while no such quality has been discovered in any other tongue at any period of the world. But apart from all this, there is a strong presumption, as Mr. Odell has shown, that mere length of syllables is, from its very nature, *incapable* of marking the rythmus in any language whatever.

Such however is the received scheme of prosody—the scheme sanctioned by all our academic institutions, and satisfactory it would seem to the majority of scholars. If the reader has never dipped into the mystery before (for notwithstanding this theory and all others, the whole is still a mystery) he may satisfy himself by taking up any Latin grammar, that the account here given is a fair one. Founded as the plan is, simply on syllabic quantity, it is yet so amazingly complex, visionary, artificial, and arbitrary, while at the same time it implies such numerous deviations from the ordinary prose pronunciation of the language, even as spoken by the ancients themselves, that it bears on its very front every token of fallacy. “What must be our astonishment, (says Walker) at this very different sound of words, arising merely from a different collocation,” to which he adds in another place,

“but if this system of *quantity* among the ancients seem strange and unaccountable, our wonder will not diminish when we inquire into the nature of their *accents*.”

But here something must be said on *accent*, which though forming no part of the received theory of versification, is included under the head of prosody, in all our grammars. That accent should *not* form a part of the theory, is of itself a very suspicious circumstance, for of so peculiar a nature was it in Greek and Latin, and so controlling an element of pronunciation, that it must necessarily have been a principal source of whatever harmony there was either in prose or verse. The doctrine of accents as laid down in the books, is simply this—there were by *name* three kinds; the acute, the grave, and the circumflex. In every word of more than one syllable, one of its syllables, and always the same, was pronounced in a *higher tone* of voice, that is to say, on a higher key than the rest, and this tone was called the *acute* accent. The *grave* was nothing more than the absence of the acute; or if any thing more, it is not known what. As to the *circumflex*, it is mentioned in so obscure a way by the ancients, that moderns have scarcely ventured to conjecture its nature. Bishop Horsley, however, quotes an author who says it was a *suffocation of voice*; and if so, there is certainly some policy in leaving out of view at least the *circumflex*, in accounting for ancient harmony. But the *acute* was so eminently the leading accent, as often to be called simply *the accent*—and of so much consequence was it, that all classic writers speak of it as the most conspicuous and characteristic feature in their speech. Indeed, it is manifest that to sound one particular syllable in each word higher than the rest, and to do this uniformly, must be so striking to the ear, that every thing like metre or rhythmus would essentially depend on the disposition of such an accent. The reader therefore may easily perceive that *assuming* this to be the nature of ancient accent, as our grammars do, and yet omitting it in the theory of metrical composition, is a monstrous discrepancy. Not that I believe myself that such an accent ever existed, though all the big scholars have insisted upon it. Speech thus modulated would have been a mere chaunt, so monotonous as to be absolutely wearisome, and so peculiar, that, as Odell remarks, it could never have been lost—yet among no modern people, not even modern Greeks, is there any such thing—Does it not, moreover, surpass all belief, that the Romans should have had just the same accents

as the Greeks, and so peculiar too?—But to return to the theory.

That an hypothesis so encumbered with difficulties, should have found opponents, is far less surprising than that it should have found believers—and for my own part, I am not convinced it has now, or ever has had, *any* believers of adult age. Its avowed dissenters, we know, have been very numerous; and a variety of substitutes have been offered, in hope of arriving at something more rational and consistent—but all in vain—perfectly in vain, as to accounting for any harmony perceptible to moderns, or even to the ancients. For as Walker says, “Let us view the Greek and Latin pronunciation on which side we will, we must, to be consistent with their own rules, feel them to be extremely monotonous,” and in this opinion, he adds, he is fully supported, “notwithstanding all the fine things which the ancients, and even many moderns say, of the variety and harmony of those languages.” In fact, it would be impossible to have better or more abundant proof of the *want* of harmony in ancient verse, than is furnished by the numerous plans proposed from time to time by learned theorists, for its improvement. Nor could we have more plenary evidence of the absurdity of the received scheme. Of those plans, I shall briefly describe three or four, in order to give the unlearned reader some idea of the curious pranks that have been played, in endeavouring to resolve on rational principles, effects purely imaginary.

The doctrines of one class of prosodial heretics have been minutely expounded by Dr. Foster, and Bishop Horsley. These writers maintain, and plausibly enough, that the received theory, resting as it does on nothing but length of syllables, is altogether deficient. To make out any harmony in ancient verse; we must call in aid, say they, another element of speech, namely *accent*, which in classic languages, as before mentioned, meant *tone*, though with us it means *emphasis*. Accent, they say, must be availed of if we wish to understand what ancient poetry *was*, or hope to enjoy any pleasure from it at present; and Foster assigns to it even a greater influence than to quantity. They argue the matter at great length—deluge you with classic quotations; and though full of inconsistencies, puerilities, and contradictions, yet treat the subject as skilfully as perhaps any men could do, who had no means of judging. Lord Monboddo also seems to join in the plan, and brings in his full quota of nonsense. But as these

celebrated scholars have neglected to point out any *way*, in which the accents can be used, doubtless for a very good reason, all the defects so loudly condemned in the received system remain just as they were—they have been amply exposed, but not corrected. In a word, their plan is no improvement, for the simple reason that it is impracticable—and in point of theory equally hypothetical. Besides which, Mr. Moore, and numberless others, contend that accent is wholly *subversive of quantity*.

Another theory with which the world has been favoured by the more speculative sort of unbelievers, was first broached, I believe, by the famous Vossius, and was soon espoused by Hennenius, Grevius, and a long train of learned men. These authors are of the opinion, sanctioned they say by the ancients themselves, that accent and quantity always *coincide*—that is to say, that the accent (the acute accent I mean) falls always and exclusively on *long* syllables; and thus by making these more conspicuous or more emphatic in pronunciation, adds wonderfully to the force as well as the melody of Roman verse. This theory, which was anterior to that before mentioned, was so ably supported that it made a prodigious disturbance in the learned world, gained many converts, and may boast of numerous disciples at this very day. Indeed it was principally to check the inroads made by the partizans of Vossius, that Doct. Foster was induced to take up the pen—for though he insists himself, as we have seen, that accents should be used *some how or other*, he rails stoutly, and not always decently, against this particular mode of using them, stigmatizing it as “a barbarous and perverted application of them.”—Foster contends that accent, so far from lengthening a syllable, as the German theory assumed, has directly a contrary effect; and Horsley says the same. The truth is, that Vossius’s scheme, like all the rest, is a mere creature of the fancy. It possesses however a decided advantage, in point of simplicity, both over Foster’s and over the common one—which in a matter of this sort, where all is conjecture, is no slight recommendation.

Different again from either of the foregoing, and diametrically opposed to the prosody of our schools, is the plan recommended and perhaps originated, by that giant in Latin, Doct. Bentley. This plan requires that *quantity*, the sole constituent in the received scheme, should be wholly *disregarded*, and that Latin should be pronounced exclusively by *accent*. It would seem too, from Foster’s statement of it, that

Bentley places the accent precisely where, in the English mode of reading Latin, we commonly and naturally lay the syllabic emphasis. The example given by him and copied by Foster, is the four first lines of Virgil marked exactly in that manner—after which Bentley is thus quoted—“He that reads these verses properly and tunefully will pronounce them according to these accentual marks; and *not* like school boys scanning them and placing the accent at the beginning of each *foot*.” This doctrine, to say the least of it, is well imagined, extremely accommodating, and would save a world of trouble. It is also admirably calculated to console the English reader; for though it militates directly against our theory, it tallies neatly with our practice; and flatters us with the belief that an abundance of harmony may be elicited by pronouncing Latin verse according to the analogy of our vernacular speech. All we have to do is to pronounce in a *higher tone* (for accent, as our prosody says, was anciently *tone*) the very same syllables we usually and naturally emphasize, and we shall hit the thing exactly. Bentley indeed might perhaps let us off on still easier terms; for if by *accent* he should happen to mean *emphasis* (and most writers have sadly confounded them) we already pronounce, it seems, to great perfection, notwithstanding Doct. Foster and hundreds of others have complained so bitterly. And in fact it is pretty certain that such was his meaning; for although we are told from high authority (North Am. Rev. vol. 11th page 215) that practising the rules of Greek accent, is a very material part of an accurate Greek education, yet we have never heard of the *Greek accent* being attempted by any one. At any rate, it cannot be denied that Bentley’s suggestion is full of good sense:—all parties admit the impossibility of conforming our practice to the existing theory; and surely the next best thing we can do, is to take a theory that conforms to practice.

There is one circumstance worth mentioning here to show what queer notions men have entertained on this subject—which is, that Scaliger was of opinion (if we can depend on Foster) that the *ancients themselves* pronounced in the very way Bentley proposes—so nicely did those knowing people foresee where English readers would lay the emphasis.

The only remaining project I shall refer to, (for there is no end of them) we owe to the prolific ingenuity of Lord Kames. Too philosophical to be satisfied with hypotheses so purely fanciful as those already described, all which, together with

many others, he must have examined, his Lordship starts a doctrine as bold as it was original. He sets out with affirming positively, what others seem only to imply, that dactyles, spondees, and the whole apparatus of prosody as now taught, was an artificial contrivance of grammarians merely to test the accuracy of poetic composition; and that no melody whatever can be extracted by attending to such rules. In lieu therefore of principles so indefinite and arbitrary, he unfolds at some length as a substitute, a *system of pauses*, simple enough and of easy application—by attending to which, ancient poetry may be read, he says, with much better effect; while at the same time all the conditions of a hexameter line will be fulfilled. This plan seeks no aid either from accent or quantity, yet does not expressly exclude them; so that these may be availed of in whatever proportion the reader pleases. One can hardly avoid feeling some surprise at the boldness of this eminent critic in thus overtly and directly attacking the venerable though visionary fabric of ancient prosody. The same thing is done obliquely, to be sure, by every succedaneum that has been offered; but he was the first, as far I know, who recorded his protest in plain language. As to the merits of his project, it must be acknowledged to be at least as good as any before described, and to be supported by arguments in some degree plausible. Walker remarks upon it as follows—“When we consider the obscurity in which the subject is involved, and the inefficacy of all preceding attempts at explanation, we cannot much wonder at the view his Lordship has taken.” The Edin. Encyclopedia adopts it likewise as the best account that can be given of the elements of ancient verse. Nevertheless, it was obviously made up for the emergency, and on the whole is very far from being satisfactory.

The several schemes to which I have now adverted, and as briefly as was possible to give any idea of them, are among the more elaborate efforts made at various periods by scholars themselves, either to account for the musical effect of classic poetry in times of old, or to convince us it *ought* to be musical now. Considered in the former view, they are all deplorably ineffectual; in the latter perfectly farcical. All this however is not the quarter part of what has been done in the same way to save appearances.

There is yet one class of writers who deserve to be mentioned, were it only for the conciliating spirit they have manifested. Mr. Primatt, with several more, apprehending seri-

ous consequences from the warfare raging between those noted rivals, accent and quantity, backed on either side by a troop of exasperated partizans, hit on an excellent method of hushing up the dispute by compromise. His proposition was to divide the empire equally between them, by allotting the domain of prose to one, and the region of poetry to the other. But unfortunately, the suggestion was by no means so kindly received by either party as its fairness deserved; and Bishop Horsley in particular treated it with great contempt.

The preceding schemes, it should be remarked, are such only as could boast of a class of disciples more or less numerous. It was not worth while to notice individual opinions, or I might have instanced Mr. Walker as having laid claim to certain improvements—and so with Mr. Harris, Mr. Fox, and many others.

On this side the Atlantic, the more sober character of scholarship, joined to the want of leisure, having prevented our academicians from taking any part in this ridiculous affair, the disputes just alluded to have been little known. Hence the prevailing sentiment among our critics can hardly be determined; and hence too, the scheme in vogue has kept the even tenor of its way without opposition, and almost without suspicion. We have little data even for conjecturing what is thought on controverted points. Mr. Pickering, I should imagine, however, is an accentuallist, and that Mr. Everett for the most part takes the side of quantity. Doct. Wilson evidently does not interest himself in the question—and would consent probably to lay the whole machinery of prosody aside. The case is the same, I suspect, with Mr. Moore.

I would now beg the reader to pause for a moment, and reflect on what has been stated, the correctness of which, on material points, will not be called in question—And I would ask, can there be any thing rational in teaching a system like that in use, so discordant in itself, and so much disputed by men the best qualified to judge? Does the teaching of it comport at all with that calm philosophic view of things, of which the present age may, in most respects, so justly boast? Is any useful substantial knowledge gained thereby?—Certainly not. But the most singular fact in the case remains yet to be explained—which is, that the system is not in the smallest degree conformed to in reading ancient poetry, as I shall presently show. It is completely a dead letter.

I would first advert however to a theory of versification of a totally different character from either of the preceding—

one that is grounded on general principles, is alike common to all languages, and terminates probably much nearer the truth. I allude to what is suggested by Scoppa, and, as it would appear from him, before then, by St. Augustine, Sacchi, and others—what is further explained by Sheridan, and also by Steele in his *prosodia rationalis*—and fully developed by Odell in an essay published in 1805. This last mentioned writer treats the subject in a manner really philosophical. He commences with a scientific analysis of articulate and of musical sounds—he then investigates the audible qualities of the dead languages, as far as those qualities are definitely described by ancient authors—examines the views taken of them by several of the moderns before-mentioned—quotes many passages from ancient poets to prove that then, as well as now, syllables were of *various* lengths, and also that their verse may be divided in *various* ways; and in fine, discusses elaborately the nature and elements of versification in general. The result of all his reasoning, which is throughout equally intelligible and philosophical, is as follows,

“As the governing principles of *rythmus* (says he) is therefore *not to be found in length*, either of notes or syllables, it can only be in the *emphasis*—in that action or affection which is natural to all languages and to every species of melody, and to which modern grammarians have very improperly given the name of accent. It is manifest therefore that what has been hitherto considered a great defect and even barbarism in modern tongues, has at all times been alike inherent in every language—namely, that in versification the *rythmus* depends on *emphatic impulse*.”—To this he adds, that “without alternate emphasis and remission, the most exact pronunciation of long and short syllables in any language, and in any possible order, would be a mere unanimated syllabification.”

Now here we have an hypothesis in a tenfold degree more rational than any before alluded to; and one that while it lowers amazingly the pretensions of ancient poetry in its best estate, places in their proper light those numberless imaginary charms, the illusive idols of classic faith.

Let us now revert to the received scheme of prosody, for the purpose of seeing how it is carried into operation, or to speak more accurately, how entirely it is lain aside in practice. We have seen that the scheme is founded on the *supposition* that in Greek and Latin there are but two kinds of syllables in point of length; and also that nothing but syllabic

quantity need be regarded—all which however, we have likewise seen, is contradicted by some of the ancient, and a large majority of the best modern writers. But putting out of view the inference naturally suggested by the latter circumstance, though sufficient of itself in an enlightened age, one would think, to consign the whole to oblivion, let us see what the scheme, *if true*, would require to make it effectual; and let us compare it with our course of practice.

It is evident at first view, that to realize any harmony in ancient poetry, or indeed in any poetry, something more is necessary than the mere comprehension of an abstract theory. Homer and Virgil would never sing at so cheap a rate. To be sensible of any melody in their verse, even assuming it to be constructed conformably to the theory stated, it is requisite that a reader should become so familiar with the language as to decide, while he reads, that each syllable be long or short according to rule, and that it be properly placed—or at least, that far the greater portion be so—and this we may venture to say is not within the power of a hundred men in this country. But it is important further to observe, that even this would not suffice—the reader must not only know what syllables are *called* long and what short, he must be able also to attach to each in his own mind a *proportionate sound*, corresponding with its true length—for without sound, or an associated idea of sound, (of which latter we are all sensible in reading English), there most certainly can be no melody. Now this, we may rely upon it, no modern, of any age or country, has ever been able to do, or ever pretended to do.—So far from any thing of this kind, it is well known to every student of Latin, that in our common mode of reading it, prosodial rules and length of syllables are never thought of—the pronunciation being entirely governed by the analogy of our own language—and Buttman acknowledges that when *quantity* is left out of view “all poetical measure is lost.”—But in our practice, *accent* is neglected as much as quantity; and therefore if Doct. Foster’s simile be just, that to read by either alone is like a man walking with one leg; to omit both is certainly very much like walking without any legs at all.

It is very true, we now and then *by chance* place a long sound coincident with rule; but Doct. Foster laments it should so seldom happen, and gives the line *Tityre tu patulæ*, &c. as an example—remarking that we here make but two syllables long, though our rules require seven—and the same thing occurs more or less in every line.

And besides, each modern nation has its own *peculiar manner* of reading the dead languages. The Germans have theirs, which Foster calls barbarous—the French have theirs, which he might just as well call barbarous—and the Italians have their fashion. And these manners are so materially different, that the people of one country can with difficulty understand Latin as spoken in the other; and Monboddo says, if Cicero were living, he would not understand a single word spoken by either. Now this very circumstance might disclose to us, by a slight effort of thought, the true state of the case—which is, that whatever there be of an agreeable nature in the dead languages, thus variously pronounced, so far from being *inherent* in them, it is merely the harmonious cadence, vernacular with each people, *transferred* to the language they are reading. There is no other possible way to account for any melody at all. And is it conceivable that this can equal in *degree* what each nation may realize from vernacular compositions, where words are chosen and arranged on metrical principles, as familiar to the reader as to the writer? It is out of the question. The real fact is, that in ancient poetry there is a great *deficiency* of pleasing cadence—it is an instrument entirely out of tune—and to the disappointment thus *felt* by classical men, with their Homer and their Virgil before them, must be ascribed the many whimsical and abortive attempts at improvement, of which I have endeavoured to give the reader some idea.

We have all heard, however, of an artificial mode of reading among boys at school, called *scanning*, which is supposed by people unacquainted with the subject, and even by many scholars, to be a conformity to ancient pronunciation. But in truth, it is no conformity, nor even an approximation. In scanning, we do not so much as *attempt* to give to syllables the length of sound assigned by rule; and if we did it would be in vain. The most that is aimed at, is to place an *emphasis* on syllables called long (though not long in fact) instead of emphasizing according to English analogy. But emphasis, we must remember, is in its very nature a distinct thing from length of sound, and can in no case produce the same effect. So that in the scanning process, quantity is not marked at all in its proper way, nor ancient accent marked in any way. The whole theory, consequently, by which we profess to be governed, is as completely abandoned in this mode of reading as in the common mode. If this explanation be intelligible to the *unlearned* reader, for whom alone it was intended, he will think with me probably, that this puerile artifice of scanning,

is the most ridiculous scene in the whole farce. So indeed it is, and so it was viewed by Bentley, the greatest latinist of modern times, as well as by Kames, to say nothing of many others ; and so I dare say it is now viewed by three fourths of those whose irksome duty it is to listen, day after day, to this whining babble of the school-room.

I have now shown by a variety of reasoning, as well as by the admission of scholars themselves, that the received scheme of prosody is vague, hypothetical, anomalous, and therefore, to all appearance, spurious. And I have shown further that whether spurious or not, it is never in the smallest degree conformed to.

In any possible view of the subject then, one very remarkable circumstance attends the case—a circumstance entirely *unique*—which is, that the very theory taught with such unwearied assiduity in our schools, and there encouraged by the highest honours, and the greatest rewards (literally speaking) in reality explains *nothing* ; neither the harmony *supposed* to have been enjoyed by the ancients, nor what is *said* to be enjoyed by moderns. Almost every writer has confessed it to be utterly incompetent to either. In the name of common sense then (if common sense is to have any sway) what is the theory for ? And do we live in an age when our most respectable seminaries countenance things of this sort ?—when absurdities, at once so palpable and so puerile, are to be sanctioned, and the precious time of our youth wasted on them, merely because they have come down to us as a part of *the system* ?

Dr. Gregory certainly speaks much too favourably of this mass of nonsense in calling it “ a species of elegant trifling,” it is at best a stupid and childish plaything.

While therefore it remains for parents to determine, if they will any longer consent to waste their children’s time on studies so foolish and so useless, I submit to the reader, whether the mere *fact* of such a scheme forming part of the regular and usual course of classical education, is not, of itself alone, enough to create a *suspicion* that the whole system is illusory in its promised advantages and objects ; and whether, in this way, it does not corroborate, in some measure at least, the views and reasonings presented in former chapters.

☞ For Note of References see next page.

NOTE OF REFERENCES TO CHAP. IX.

The following works, as far as any one might be inclined to examine them, would be found to confirm the representations here given of Ancient Poetry. Some few pages are noted as bearing more particularly on important points, and as supplying quotations.

Walker's Key, page 315 to 324—334, 343.

Foster on Accent and Quantity, page 68, 53, 294, 297, 305, 361.

Horsley's Prosody, page 11, 22, 26, 55, 124.

Odell's Essay, page 131, 134, 142, 149, 174, 187.

Monboddo, vol. 2. p. 329, 330, 415.

Buttman's Grammar, p. 15, 282.

Kames's Elements, chap. 18.

Lowth's Lectures, p. 44.

Harris's Inquiries, part 2. chap. 2.

Edin. Ency.—Article, Poetry.

Rees' Ency.—Art. Accent—Quantity—Prosody—Versification.

Nares on Orthoepy, p. 141, 209.

Aristotle's Poetics by Pye, p. 397, 402.

Correspondence between Wakefield and Fox, p. 118.

Mitford's, Knight's, Pickering's, and Moore's Essays on the pronunciation of Greek and Latin,

Beattie's Essay on Poetry, p. 278.

Scoppa's Vrais principes de Versification, p. 131, 141, 147, 182.

Sheridan's Lectures.

North Am. Review, No. 24, Art. 7.

CHAPTER X.

Concluding Remarks on the general subject.

THE several alleged advantages of classical studies, as enumerated at page 18, and embracing every thing of any consequence, have now all been examined, and proved to be fallacious. Some persons, however, may still be inclined to think, that though neither argument has any great force separately taken, yet the whole together may amount to a justification of the reigning system. To this it may be answered, that many fractions make but a small sum. It may be replied further, that the recommendations there specified can operate collectively, but very seldom. It can happen only when an acquaintance with ancient languages, and ancient authors is both accurate and familiar—a thing of extremely rare occurrence, and not otherwise attainable than by devoting to the object many years of manhood, in addition to the usual collegiate course. And can the boon be so inestimable as to require a whole life of study?

In point of fact, it is a large allowance to suppose that one in a hundred perseveres to this degree. On the other hand, a scholar who lays aside his books with his college robe, must know far too little of the languages, (whatever these *might* be capable of) either to improve his style—to enlarge his information—to multiply his sources of amusement—or to trace the genealogy of words derived from classic tongues. Here then, are four out of the half dozen every-day arguments which have clearly nothing to do with students of this description, who nevertheless compose ninety-nine of every hundred. With respect to all such, no hope is left, but for the employment of their time—the exercise of their mental faculties—or the improvement of their grammar. Now I grant that their time is employed, and to a deplorable extent. I grant also, that their mind is exercised, though by no means in the best way—but as to English grammar, this most certainly could in no respect be aided by the utmost skill in foreign tongues, that ever fell to the lot of man.

And besides, how few whose patience holds out even as far as the college. The more usual practice is to close their labours at the grammar school, and then go their ways into the world, one to his farm, another to his merchandize. The little they have learnt was never understood ; or if understood, is soon forgotten ; and the consequence is, they carry through life the mortifying recollection (participated however, by not a few of deeper learning) of having wasted many a precious year on studies sanctioned only by custom, to the neglect of others, of which they daily and hourly feel the want. Indeed the little smattering of Latin, picked up with such unceasing toil at the grammar school, is quite as much as either the temper or the taste of most children can bear ; and as much, it would appear, as most parents desire. But such a course of proceeding, though by far the most usual, has been condemned and ridiculed by the greater portion even of professed advocates of classical studies, and by Dr. Knox among the rest. " The time (says he) that is usually spent on Lilly's grammar, (the common Latin grammar of his day,) and in acquiring just so much knowledge of Latin as may inspire a young man with conceit, is certainly very ill bestowed."* The lot of this class of students is really the hardest lot of all—they have not even the *reputation* of learning to solace them. Those who go through their education, as the phrase is, do perhaps a *little* better. In virtue of their diploma, they take rank with scholars ; and thus the pride of scholarship becomes a partial offset, and brings in a small drop of consolation. This is little enough to be sure ; still it is something.

But why, it may be asked, does scholarship raise her crest so high ?—Why do men plume themselves on acquisitions so indeterminate, and so unsubstantial ? The reason, as I believe, simply is, because academic influence has set its seal on that sort of acquisition, and fashion has attached her countersign. It is worth remembering however, that there was a time when *alchemy* enjoyed the same consideration, and was sustained by the same means as Greek and Latin are now ; and another time when the only avenue to fame led through the dreary maze of *syllogistic logic*. There was also a time, and that too the vaunted era of Greece and Rome, when *physical science* (the most valuable, because the most useful of human

* Knox's 3d Essay.

attainments) was literally *banished* from the world by this very tyrant, fashion. In a word, as fashion determines most things, whether in the way of adoption or exclusion, she has given her passport to many a folly; and by enlisting on its side a numerous train of interested defenders, has often made her bantling a modish personage for several generations. It is indeed the very nature of established opinion, right or wrong, to *perpetuate itself*; for what all take to be sound, though never *proved* to be so, few will give themselves the trouble to scrutinize—and thus it happens that error is transmitted from age to age, as it were by common consent. But can fashion, or custom if you please to call it, by whatever influence upheld, be of paramount authority in a rational philosophic point of view? By no means—She may be summoned at any time to the bar of reason, to justify her decisions; and this is exactly the object in the present instance.

The attempt has been to show, both by argument, and by the confessions of scholars themselves, that classical learning, under its more usual and most specious forms of vindication, is not to be justified; and if this has been satisfactorily accomplished, it is quite enough for the purpose. To go fully into the numerous collateral topics, connected by one channel and another, with the general theme; or to investigate the variety of minor influences, that have lent their aid to the existing system, might have far exceeded the scope of the writer's intelligence, and quite as far perhaps, the reader's patience.

Two or three things of this nature, however, may be very briefly adverted to. And in the first place may be noticed the close alliance that has always subsisted between the dead languages and the fine arts. The extraordinary celebrity the latter enjoyed during the 16th and 17th centuries, as objects of taste, was of incalculable service to the former. The fashion of the times ran altogether in the channel of the arts, assigning the highest distinction to success in those departments; and the best early models having been derived from Greece and Rome, it was natural enough to look to the same source for excellence in every kind—of course their language must be studied, and their literature explored. Of course too, the multitude of persons connected in various ways with academic institutions, would afford all possible patronage to the arts, for sake of its reaction on ancient literature; and while this class of men on the one hand, were lavishing their encomiums on painting, sculpture, and architecture, a host of artists

and amateurs on the other, were no less active in magnifying the advantages of classical learning. In this way have the scholar and the artist reciprocated their compliments with great effect, and secured a high standing for both—a standing in my opinion altogether unmerited, as regards the first ; and in some measure so, as regards the last.

Another thing that might very properly be included in a comprehensive view of the subject, would be the state of general knowledge, as found in Greece and Rome, compared with that of other cotemporary, or still more ancient people. By an appeal to facts brought to light of late years by philosophical researches into the early condition of eastern nations, such a comparison might be drawn very little to the advantage of the classic age. The Chinese unquestionably, were superior in all useful branches of knowledge at least, if not in others ; and so were, or had been the Egyptians and Persians. In Hindostan too, according to Sir W. Jones, and other antiquarians, science no less than art was carried quite as far as in Greece, perhaps farther—and the same thing occurred not long after in Arabia. Yet some people seem to think that the only civilization that ever smiled upon the world was born in Greece, and died in Rome—which by the way, is very much the notion our lads imbibe at school.

Another topic again that might well deserve some attention, is the intrinsic merit of classic languages—on the beauties and perfections of which, scholars have never ceased to ring the changes for many centuries past. Every thing that is admirable, in point of intellectual refinement, has been inferred from modes of speech so curiously contrived. But however well it may have done, at one time, to talk in such a strain ; yet now, since the same peculiarities are found to exist, and even to greater perfection, in every dialect of our savage tribes (a coincidence, by the bye, at which Monboddo more than hinted some fifty years ago) we are bound in common honesty, to strike all this from our list of wonders. Nevertheless, the same antiquated notions still keep possession of our schools ; and, by that very influence, are still buoyed up on the stream of error in public opinion.

On the subjects just mentioned, together with many more, very erroneous impressions, there is reason to believe, are yet prevalent ; and in proportion as these shall be dissipated by the active spirit of inquiry now abroad in the world, the props and stays of the ancient fabric will fall away. My aim has

been levelled at its very foundation—its corner stones—and I say now, as I said before, that either the course of reasoning here pursued, must be fairly met and confuted ; or things must be left to go on by the mere impetus of habit, without any appeal to rational considerations. But when matters are brought to this pass, reason is abandoned.

In closing the subject, I must be allowed to observe, that if any who dip their pens at the classic fount, be roused on this occasion, they should not trust too much to mere declamation, or even elegant composition. As little would it help their cause to cavil at the manner in which objections are urged ; or to endeavour to hunt down an assailant with the hue and cry of *barbarism*—for though such expedients have often succeeded, it is too late in the day for all that. Nor would it aught avail, to prove even to demonstration, that Greek and Latin *have been* of essential service to the modern world ; for as much may be said of numberless things now wisely abandoned. The science of heraldry, for example, was unquestionably at one time a useful study, being closely allied to the tenure of property, of title, and of rank ; but as the state of society became changed, heraldic learning was permitted to die away. In like manner the institutions of chivalry had no doubt a powerful tendency in the 12th and 13th centuries to civilize a rude unlettered age—yet whoever might now advise us to mount the spear and the helmet to vindicate the rights of the fair, would most assuredly become a fair object of ridicule. The sex with us, thank heaven, stand in no need of knights-errant to rescue them from caprice and tyranny, such as they were occasionally exposed to at that period ; nor from a state of forlorn seclusion, tenfold more galling, and a thousand fold more degrading, like that under which they languished in Greek and Roman times. From classic bondage they were effectually emancipated by those *anti-classical* people, the Goths and Vandals.

Neither mode of defence, I say, above described, would be any vindication of the existing system. Its advocates have a more arduous task to perform. If indeed, they could make it appear, that knowledge and science in all their variety, or even any one important branch, is better displayed in ancient than in modern tongues, it would be something to the purpose. But where is the man who will advance any such pretensions ? However, be their claims what they may, let them be stated

in a definite tangible form—let us no longer be deluged with vague assertion and splendid panegyric. According to my way of thinking, Greek and Latin have long outlived their usefulness. If any really think otherwise, it is incumbent on them not only to designate what valuable ends can thereby be attained, but to show *how* they can be attained, or as scholars phrase it, the *modus operandi*. To do less than this would be doing nothing.

APPENDIX.

Note A referred to at page 36.

The following Extracts are from a review of Barrett's Grammar, in the North American of April, 1821.

“ For mere English learners, the process (that of *parsing*) is the more preposterous as the names of the parts of speech, of most of the inflexions, and of the rules of grammar, are a dead letter to them—built on analogies wholly unknown to them, and often grounded on the analogy of languages wholly different in their structure from the English. Much of our grammar is accordingly not English grammar, but rules for translating Latin into English. We have but two *cases* in our nouns, but are taught in some grammars (old ones he means) that there are six. Not more than half our adjectives have degrees of comparison; and all that is strictly true about the rest is, that *pulcrior* instead of being rendered *beautiful*, should be rendered *more beautiful*. In the verbs, we have but one tense besides the present, and yet our English grammars fit out the verb with six tenses. But to say that the perfect tense of *love*, is *I have loved*, means that *amavi*, for want of a corresponding English inflection, must be translated *I have loved*, which by the way it does not mean more than half the time. Much the same is the case with the *modes*; and had the Arabian Grammarians attained the ascendancy in the European schools, which the Latin ones did, our verbs would probably have been adorned with 28 conjugations in imitation of that copious language.

“The most that can be useful in the science of English grammar, is to have a name and a rule for all the inflections and peculiarities, which really exist. But to have an English tense, or an English case, for every thing analagous in Latin and Greek, is to study (to teach) Latin and Greek, and not English. Nor is there any greater propriety in having a first and second future in English, than a first and second aorist and a dual number. And since there exists, and probably will

continue to, a strong hankering after what is called parsing, we really wish some judicious teacher would have courage to analyse the language as it is, and teach his children not Latin and Greek grammar in disguise, but simple English."

Now all this, though a downright classical heresy, I look upon to be sound sense. But the call here made on *judicious teachers* to analyse the language as it is, and teach their children (their scholars too is probably meant) the true English grammar, comes with not the best grace from one who *sees* the evil, and has *abundant leisure* to apply himself to its correction. The bulk of our teachers, he well knows, are Latin scholars, placed in English schools; and it would seem from this account, entirely *misplaced*. Such men have no motive, either from pride or interest, to lessen the reputation of Latin, and *this* probably is the reason they are not *judicious* in the way so much desired by the reviewer. To my knowledge, however, there *are* teachers, acquainted only with English, and who instruct only in that, fully sensible of the evil here pointed out—but they are men, whose office is no sinecure; whose whole time is absorbed, and whose body and mind are wearied, by the numberless annoyances of a daily school; who have little leisure therefore, either to make books, or translate them. Besides which, they are well aware that, as opinion now stands, no improvement of this kind, suggested by a mere English scholar, would be listened to for a moment. But why does not the Professor himself become that judicious teacher he *really wishes* should appear?—Why has not *he* given us that genuine English grammar so much wanted, instead of an additional Greek grammar not wanted at all?

Note B referred to at page 46.

What is said on the Chinese language at page 46, stands the same as first printed in the newspaper; and it was left so in order that mistakes might be acknowledged. Having never previously examined any Grammar, Dictionary, or other work professedly designed to explain the curious structure of that language, my impressions were derived from various incidental notices of it, which had fallen in my way. I had supposed that the ideas expressed by the more complex Chinese characters, were compounded, like the characters themselves, of others more simple, and were therefore complex ideas. I had supposed likewise, that many of those characters admitted certain changes, for the purpose of grammatical construc-

tion, though nowise analogous to verbal inflexions in other languages.

It appears, however, on reference to Marsham's Grammar, which, by the way is one of the most philosophical expositions I ever saw of any idiom, that my impression was erroneous on both points—and that I had entirely forgotten what had long before been said on the subject by Monboddó, whose remarks, it would seem, were pretty correct. The fact is, the ideas denoted by the more complex form of Chinese symbols are as simple as any others, however compounded that form itself may be. Then as to grammatical construction, this depends not in the least on inflexion, for there is no such thing; but wholly on *position*. It appears also, and perhaps necessarily results from the case, that the *meaning* of a character is materially influenced by the circumstance of position, though its form remains unalterably the same. One and the same sign may be a verb, a noun, or any other part of speech (as we should term it) according to its place in the sentence—which indeed often happens in our own language and more or less perhaps in all. The Chinese, however, is probably the only language whose grammar is wholly and exclusively resolved by *position*; and it is curious to observe how admirably well the end is accomplished by means so simple. Tooke's view of the origin of *particles* in our vernacular idiom is so fully illustrated by almost every sentence of the Chinese, that had the latter been well understood in Europe a century ago, his ingenious discoveries would in all probability, have been by many years anticipated. It is worth remarking too, that what has been termed *Universal Grammar*, is here completely at fault—its universality is conclusively disproved.

From what sources were derived my own mistaken notions first alluded to, is to be sure of little consequence—they were errors, and I willingly renounce them. One of those sources, however, was unquestionably a passage from Remusat, quoted both by Mr. Duponceau and Mr. Pickering, in whose essays it had often met my eye, though to my present surprise, without engaging much attention. It is as follows—"It is indeed, impossible (says he) to express in any language the energy of those picturesque characters (the Chinese) which exhibit to the eye, instead of barren and arbitrary sounds, the objects themselves figured and represented by their most characteristic traits, so that it would require several phrases to express the signification of a single word." Now to say nothing of the exceedingly inaccurate description here given of Chinese

characters, one can hardly avoid inferring from the whole spirit of these remarks, that the writer entertained very singular and very unphilosophical views of the nature of language in general. For why talk of the *energy of picturesque characters*, as if the vividness or the precision of the idea depended on the form of the symbol. Why talk about *barren and arbitrary sounds*, as if sounds or signs could, in themselves, be any thing more than barren and arbitrary. Why talk about *objects figured and represented by their most characteristic traits*, as if written language, could by possibility be any thing more than signs, of conventional meaning—and as if pictures could be better than words! Why indeed talk about *sound* in any way, as an object of *sight*? All this, I confess, is to me very extraordinary—and that notions so unphilosophical, or expressions so loose (take it as you will) should have been cited without comment by the writers before named, is not much less extraordinary.

Note C referred to at page 55.

Allusion is made at page 55 to the common cant of the day, that the Greeks were *original* in every thing they did. How far this was really the case in matters of literature, moderns have had no means of judging, though they have not on this account been less forward in deciding. It may or may not be true as the Northampton teachers asserted in their prospectus, (a somewhat clumsy performance, by the way, notwithstanding their scholarship) that in tragedy and poetry the Grecians “had no predecessors to imitate;” but most certainly it is *not true*, though asserted with equal confidence, that such was the case in *philosophy*. The doctrines of the ancient Academy, the Stoa, and the Lyceum, had each of them their prototype, Sir W. Jones says, in India. It was a pretty general practice among the Greeks, if we are to believe their own story, for men of inquisitive minds to travel into Egypt and elsewhere in search of knowledge; from whence they in fact derived the greater part and the better part (though poor enough at best) of what comes down to us as Grecian wisdom. This was particularly the case with Pythagoras, who resided in Egypt for many years, and carried thence a variety of elementary knowledge in geometry and other subjects, no small portion of which he palmed on his countrymen as original discoveries.—(See Brucker’s history of Philosophy.) Monbodo remarks of this noted Grecian plagiarist that he found-

ed the wisest sect that ever existed *except the Egyptian Magi*. But what shall we think of the teachers abovementioned when they tell us that in philosophy the Grecians “*have never been equalled in succeeding times?*”—How much superior must their penetration be to that of Bacon, Descartes, Newton, Locke, Stewart, and some hundreds of the like, who had come to a very different conclusion.

It is also announced by those same gentlemen that “no one science can be thoroughly learnt without an acquaintance with the Latin tongue; while there is none, for the study of which, Greek is indispensably requisite.” But here unluckily they come directly in contact with another learned Theban, who tells a very different story. We are assured by him that *Greek* is “the Promethean torch to literature” and that without it “all is lifeless and obscure, while its genial influence pervades and gives life and animation to the remotest region of science.” (North Am. Rev. vol. 2 new series, page 210.) The intelligent reader need not be informed that both statements are purely hyperbolic, and noways near the truth. Nor must we conclude that the *real* opinions of these writers are wide apart—the want of agreement in their dogmas may be resolved by circumstances. The former had adopted Latin as a regular branch of instruction, but not Greek. The latter is a Greek scholar by profession, and was writing an essay to show its superior importance to Latin.

But perhaps it is never quite fair to take scholars at their word on themes of this kind. They are in some sort privileged characters. Mounted on their hobby, they often run truth and common sense quite out of sight. We are not to suppose these writers so low in intelligence as really to believe either Greek or Latin indispensable, or even materially convenient, in *any* branch of science. They know well enough that neither Greeks nor Romans had among them any thing deserving the *name of science*; or at least that nothing has descended to our times save only some elementary truths in Geometry. They know besides that modern Europe was far more indebted to the Arabians than to either—that chemistry, medicine, arithmetic, algebra, astronomy and many other things, even geometry, were carried to greater perfection under the Caliphs than under Pericles or Augustus—though the whole together is as dust to the balance compared with the splendid achievements of modern genius. It is well known to them that a comprehensive and accurate display of *every* science is found in living languages, and in those *only*—all this I say is well

known to most scholars; and all they assert to the contrary is well *understood* among themselves and among scientific men. But the mischief of the thing is that the community at large (including many well informed persons, not conversant however in these matters) are imposed upon by this incessant flourish of scholarship—this perpetual stream of hyperbole poured out in praise of ancient greatness. How long such habitual misrepresentation is to be tolerated, I know not; but it may well become a matter of serious consideration with reflecting and influential men, whether the game should any longer be permitted, and whether truth and reason must forever bow their head to system.

EXTRACTS.

The following is the extract referred to at page 5, taken from a piece in the Boston Palladium, of Feb. 17, signed No Innovator. In allusion to the essays in the Centinel, published some time before, the writer alleges the want of leisure as a reason for not answering them himself, and then makes an appeal to scholars in general, as follows:—

“But allow me to ask, if all who range themselves on the side of learning can plead so good an excuse. Have we not a host of men, distinguished alike for talents and acquirements, to whom the subject is already familiar in all its ramifications—men who are acute reasoners and polished writers?—Have we not also a numerous train of scholars, whose very office as Professors and Teachers, places them directly in the post of honour, and at the same time qualifies them in a peculiar manner to vindicate the cause of ancient literature?—Have we not, in addition, yet another set of literary men, delegated expressly to watch over the concerns of education, and actually superintending those municipal institutions, the utility of which is now called in question? And is it not clearly the duty of all such men, as unquestionably it is the interest of many of them, to repel every attack of that nature? Having among us so numerous and such able advocates of existing establishments, it cannot but appear to the more humble votaries of Classical Learning a circumstance no less surprising than mortifying, that doctrines should be permitted to circulate, aiming at a total change of system, without the slightest attempt to arrest their progress. Not a voice has been raised, I am ashamed to say, to justify a course of tuition, which, if those doctrines were really true, it would indeed be idle to defend, and worse than idle to practice. How is this apathy to be accounted for? Why so much shyness, why all this silence? Do our patrons of learning flatter themselves that because the essays in question are prolix, dry and argumentative, they have been little read, and can therefore do but little harm? In this I fear they are deceived. But suppose they are right, is there not a point of honour in the case; and shall we shrink from any inquiry professing to be a fair appeal to reason?”

Extracts referred to at page 7.

The following is from an article on education in the Westminster Review, No. 1.

“When the plan was first instituted, (the existing plan of classical education in England) there was some reason for it.—At that period, the Greek and Latin languages contained all the knowledge which the observation and experience of mankind had yet accumulated. Of science, properly so called, nothing was known and therefore nothing could be taught. At any rate *the little that existed* was to be found in ancient languages; and churchmen were the only persons in the community who had the least pretensions to learning. But that this plan should be continued in the present age, when Greek and Latin do not contain the *thousandth part* of the information which ought to be communicated, whether its importance be estimated by extent or value, is sufficiently extraordinary. Yet hitherto there has been no medium between studying language as the principal object of education, and as part of the course calculated only for the learned professions, and receiving no education at all. No plan of instruction has been adopted for those who are to be engaged in the active business of life. A gentleman who might happen to have no desire to be a scholar must have gone without any instruction whatever; and the merchant to whom it might not have been convenient to wade through “tremendous Lilly” has been doomed to enter the counting house with little acquaintance with the treasures of knowledge. It is no less true than lamentable, that hitherto the education proper for civil and active life has been neglected; that nothing has been done to enable those who are actually to conduct the affairs of the world, to carry them on in a manner worthy of the age and the country in which they live, by communicating to them the knowledge and the spirit of their age and country—that there has been no access by any man to the temple of science but through the gate of language, and that the only key to it has been the Westminster and Eton grammars.” p. 45.

The writer then goes into the inquiry, what are the proper studies for the *middle class* of society, by which phrase he explains himself to mean, as we shall see, *all the intelligent classes* with the exception of professional men and statesmen—and he unfolds his views as follows:—

“Of the political and moral importance of this class, there can be but one opinion—It is the strength of the community

—It contains beyond comparison the greatest proportion of the intelligence, industry and wealth of the state—In it are the heads that invent and the hands that execute—the enterprise that projects, and the capital by which these projects are carried into operation. The merchant, the manufacturer, the mechanic, the chemist, the artist, those who discover new arts and those who perfect old ones, those who extend science—the men in fact who think for the rest of the world and who do the business of the world, are all of this class. The proper education of this portion of the people is therefore of the greatest importance to the welfare of the state. Considering then their station and the nature of their pursuits, what is the kind of knowledge the most desirable to communicate to them—what are the subjects, an acquaintance with which will afford the most assistance in their occupations and the greatest enjoyments in their hours of leisure? We answer decidedly *not an acquaintance with languages of antiquity.*”

The writer then enters on some considerations of little application to any country but England, and returns to general remarks on the languages as follows—“They have nothing in common with the business of the world as it is now transacted—they do not form the topic of conversation in society—they are obsolete—they have no longer a habitation and a name, except in some degree in literature—and they possess no power of developing the faculties which is not at least equalled by other branches of learning. As we have already said, there can be no reason why there should not be profound scholars, as well as subtle pleaders and learned theologians—but nothing can equal the absurdity of consuming three fourths of the invaluable time appropriated to education, in scraping together (as Milton expresses it) so much miserable Greek and Latin, by persons to whom it is no manner of use—to whose pursuits it bears no kind of relation—who after all, acquire it so imperfectly as to derive no pleasure from it—who invariably neglect it as soon as released from school, and in the lapse of a few years allow every trace of it to be obliterated from their memory.”

The English *Monthly Magazine* for March, in noticing the above mentioned article in the Westminster Review, remarks as follows in relation to the middling classes.

“In our opinion not only have they no occasion for such an education, (the classical) but it would be detri-

mental to their future happiness, because obstructive to their manual or mercantile pursuits, by creating a taste for what those pursuits would not permit them to cultivate. This reflection brings us to the consideration of the Reviewer's opinion—that Greek and Latin, though not destitute of value, are far from being even to the higher classes, of that importance they have so long been allowed to assume. The Reviewer would have their cultivation limited to boys designed for the learned professions; and when we reflect on the time necessary to their acquirement, we are strongly disposed to think with him. If the almost incalculable number of hours devoted to this study, be compared with the few in which such acquisitions may be afterwards enjoyed—if it be considered that now almost every information (why not *every*) that can be obtained through the medium of the dead languages, may be collected from the stores of the living—that all the scientific intelligence of the ancients has been communicated to the moderns in their mother tongue; and that almost all the noble discoveries both in science and philosophy with which literature has been enriched by modern genius and modern research, is to be found in modern tongues *only*—when, we repeat, these important facts are duly weighed, we are far from feeling assured that ancient tongues are worth all the toil and time their cultivation demands.”

The following is from a late French treatise on Education.

“It results from what has been said, that children should never be permitted to learn words while ignorant of their meaning. Let us abandon this practice of getting things by heart, without attaching any ideas to them—let us accustom our children to *think*, instead of pronouncing empty sounds. Rousseau was right in prohibiting his Emile from committing much to memory. The great portion of time ought to be employed in acquiring ideas, and a small part only in learning the signs to express them. I should prefer a child to have ten ideas, though capable of explaining them but in one language, rather than one idea, with the power of expressing it in ten different dialects. It is evident that education ought not to have for its principal object the study of words, especially in a language not to be used in after years—certainly practical knowledge is much better than any assemblage of phrases. It is said that the genius of the ancient languages is superior to modern. Admitting this, yet I do not perceive that Frenchmen, who have learned Latin and Greek, write

any better on that account. It often happens that the most skilful interpreters of Greek and Latin, are surpassed in general intelligence, and left far behind in the affairs of life, by those who were much their inferiors at school. A mass of Latin and Greek, however great, and however painfully acquired, can give no facility, nor any habit of attention or reflection, nor any ability to distinguish oneself either as a statesman, a general, a physician, or an advocate. On the contrary, such studies render the mind dull and sluggish. Formerly, when works of science were chiefly written in Latin, a knowledge of it was necessary to the learned professions; but now the case is very different; and it is altogether a mistaken respect for ancient usage that continues in use the same course of studies. We say of one that he understands Latin, that he has had a liberal education—but is it wise to rest our opinion of his merit merely on that foundation.”

The following remarks are from a pamphlet printed in the State of New-York, on the project of establishing a college at Geneva, in that State; and they will serve to show that opinions are by no means so universally in favor of the languages as some would have us believe.

“Our collegiate institutions have been heretofore established with the design of preparing young men for the learned professions. Their course of discipline and instruction has this object chiefly, and perhaps solely, in view. So obviously is this the case, that a young man, who after leaving college, turns his attention to merchandize or farming, is considered in a great measure as having lost four years of his time (he might have said 8 years) at the most important period of his life. Part and a very considerable part of his studies, has no important bearing on his profession, and the habits he acquires in college are in general not favourable to his future pursuits. All the advantages he obtains of literary and scientific information, might be gained under another system, much more efficaciously, and at far less expence of time. The proposed institution will supply this desideratum.”

In the *British Critic* of March last, is a review of Dunlop's history of Roman literature. The following observations, both of the reviewer and the historian, will show us that men's eyes are beginning to open a little as to the true character and the concerns of the Romans.

“The singular destinies (says the reviewer) of this astonishing people might be supposed to give to their literature an

interest the most exalted and intense. It is however, a remarkable fact, *that the literary history of Rome is of all others the most deficient in those qualifications which would render its study interesting to the philosophic mind ; and with the exception of Juvenal, and Horace, Rome has scarcely a writer from whom any thing can be collected, concerning the private life and feelings of the Romans.*” As to Mr. Dunlop’s idea of that classic people, it may be gathered from the following quotations. “ On the whole (says he) they were an austere, stately, and formal people—their whole mode of life tended to harden the heart and the feelings, and there was a rigid uniformity in their early manners ill adapted to the free working of the passions.” “ They had by degrees been accustomed to take a barbarous delight in the most wanton displays of human violence and brutality. Lions and Elephants tore each other to pieces before their eyes ; and they beheld, with emotions only of delight, crowds of hireling gladiators wasting their energy, valour, and life, on the guilty arena of the circus.” “ The language of the Romans, however excellent in other respects, was but ill suited to the free expression of feeling. *Little attention, besides, was paid to critical learning, and the cultivation of correct composition.* Even so late as the time of Horace, the tragic drama continued to be unsuccessful in consequence of the illiberal education of the Roman youth.” The reviewer after giving these extracts and several others, adds thus, “ These several causes are enlarged upon by Mr. Dunlop, with great ability ; and to these he adds the misdirected influence of the *Greek* literature, which indeed is the great and fertile source, to which all those departures from just taste, truth, and nature, which characterise the writings of the Romans, are ultimately referable.”

Now here we have the sentiments of a learned writer, who has undertaken to investigate philosophically the character as well as the history, of Roman literature—we have the sentiments also of a professed English critic on the same subject—and what is more, we have their *honest* sentiments.

December.—This publication, though commenced and in part struck off at the date mentioned on the title page, was interrupted by circumstances, which, being of no interest to the reader, are here alluded to merely by way of apology for rather an unusual number of typographical errors—And those errors being of such a nature as sometimes to obscure the sense, and sometimes destroy it, the purchaser would perhaps do well to correct them with his pen according to the following list, which embraces all that have been detected :

- Page 3 line 21 for *invariable*, read *invariably*.
,, 8 last line for *them* read *than*.
,, 19 line 32 for *effects* read *effect*.
,, 46 line 27 for *languages* read *language*.
,, 49 line 9 for *influence* read *inference*.
,, 56 line 16 for *had* read *bad*.
,, 75 line 6 for *leave* read *learn*.
,, 76 line 34 for *the find* read *find the*.
,, 79 line 28 for *to* read *too*.
,, 94 line 3 for *a field* read *field*.

